

RAINBOW OVER MALAYA

BY

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SUSIL GUPTA
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Kalau Tuan mudak ka-hulu

Chari-kan saya bunga kemboja.

Kalau Tuan mati dahulu

Nanti-kan saya di-pintu shurga.

If Thou, my Lord, sail to the upper country,

Seek out the lover's flower to light my eyes.

If Thou, my Lord, pass first to Allah's Mercy,

Await me at the Gate of Paradise.

—MALAY PANTUN

STRONGER THAN ~~DUTTY~~!

FULTON threw down his clubs on the velvety lawn and sank into a cane chair. Dash it all, he felt like kicking himself for losing to a fellow like Dutty. Why, only the day before he had made three bogeys and a hole in one and—. The inevitable club boy in immaculate white stood by the rattan table.

"A stengah whisky soda," he said off-hand, lazily watching the parabolic flight of a ball from the fifth tee.

"By jove! some hit! Two hundred and fifty yards, if anything," he muttered, sitting up.

Two players loomed up at the corner of the clubhouse—a woman in blue slacks and canvas shoes and a man in khaki shorts and open-necked singlet. He knew the man—Jacques of the Anglo Nestles Co.; played good golf and rugger for the State. He couldn't place the woman at all, though her face seemed vaguely familiar. Fulton prided himself on knowing most ladies in town. Didn't know this one though—a newcomer perhaps.

Jacques and his companion sat down a couple of tables away from Fulton, the woman with her back towards him. Jacques, with a "How is your game, old chap!" to Fulton, ordered similar drinks.

"Awful!" Fulton muttered looking at the nape of her neck, curved and muscular as a torso. He didn't know what they were talking about but he felt that they were discussing him. Fulton finished

his drink, signed his chit and was about to move away when he felt a thunderous clap on his shoulder and heard a loud ringing voice :

"Hey! You can't get away without giving me a drink, what?"

"Hello! Davy! where on earth did you spring from? Take a pew, will you." Fulton ordered fresh drinks and offered his cigarette case to Davy. They were discussing the forthcoming inter-club golf competition when Jacques rose with his fair companion and walked off towards the car stand.

The couple passed within a few yards of their table and the woman looked full at them. Davy stood up and bowed stiffly. She gave him the merest nod and was about to say something but she abruptly closed her mouth firmly and for a second Fulton glimpsed a shade of nagging fear in her eyes. The next moment she gave a jerky laugh and was gone.

"Good Heavens! What is she doing here?" asked Davy, following her with his eyes. "Know her?"

"Can't say I do," said Fulton vaguely interested.

"Alice Barclay!"

"What! Surely not *the* Alice Barclay!"

"None other, my boy!" said Davy giving vent to a hollow laugh.

So this was poor Alice Barclay! Fulton remembered the whole story. A ghastly affair! One of those alarming incidents that one often hears in the East—a native servant murdering his master for some apparently insignificant grouse. Jim Barclay was shot through the temple by his native "boy"

li. Of course, in this case, there was a tremendous wail and cry for Barclay was one of the "burra ahibs."

"Poor fellow, Jim!" said Fulton shaking his head sympathetically. "A d—d good sort he was. What did Ali get?"

"Fifteen years!" said Davy gloomily.

"Serve the scoundrel right," snapped Fulton.

"Well—I don't know. I rather feel sorry for Ali," said Davy looking into the depths of his "stengah."

"What!" said Fulton indignantly. "Surely the beggar deserved his sentence. It was a prima facie case and besides there was the circumstantial evidence. I believe there was a sort of confession, so, wasn't there?"

"I am afraid you know very little of the real facts of this case," remarked Davy quietly.

"Of course, that is all I heard from fellows at the club. I was home on leave when this—er—this unfortunate affair took place."

It was getting dark and the club house was nearly deserted. The Malay caddies squatted on the lawn and whistled softly nondescript Malay "Kronchongs." The club boy paced up and down the club veranda and the infernal mosquitoes were behaving abominably. The distant hills lay enclosed in a canopy of gorgeous hues—orange, blue and indigo—a magic panorama browned out by the last rays of a setting tropical sun.

"Well, where are you dining to-night, Fulton?"

"At my club. And you?"

"Let us beetle over there and I will tell you all about the Barclay case."

II

Dinner over, they had a short game of billiard and after that they settled down on long rattan easy chairs placed on the lawn. It was a typical Malayan night—starry, warmish, the air laden with the confused scent of a hundred different tropical flowers. Fulton lighted a cheroot and Davy called for drinks.

"By the way, Fulton, did you know that Barclay was a Rugger Blue?" asked Davy abruptly.

"Why, no, but has that anything to do with this—er—this affair?"

"Well, yes and no. You see, Jim Barclay was an all-round sportsman in his younger days. Life without rugger, tennis, golf and shooting was inconceivable. Yet he was deprived of all these, except for an occasional game of golf and tennis.

"In the good old days when he first came over to the Malay States, you didn't find golf courses spread all over the Peninsula as you do now. Clubs were few and far between and golf and tennis were luxuries which only the biggest clubs could afford then. Unfortunately for him, he was first stationed in Pahang where things were even more dreadful. Why, my dear fellow, there were hardly two dozen white people round Kuala Lipis."

"But what on earth has all these jolly old reminiscences got to do with—"

"Steady, my son. You can't build bricks without straw and you can't get the hang of the story unless I give you the proper background and create the suitable atmosphere."

"All right—shoot ahead," mumbled Fulton, taking a long sip at his glass.

"So Barclay spent his week-days," continued Davy, "drinking hard and playing patience. But during week-ends one couldn't find him in town. He took long treks into the jungle Sakai settlements or went wild boar hunting. For some odd reason Barclay took a great fancy to these simple Malayan aborigines and in a few years' time he knew more about the Sakai than any other white man of his time. In fact, his monograph on Sakai life is an authority. In such expeditions to Sakai camps and shootings he was always accompanied by Dr. Botley and myself. Ali acted as guide, interpreter, boy and general factotum. He was still in his teens and was a great favourite both of the Tuans and the other servants.

"While Barclay studied the life, customs, and manners of the Sakai in general, Dr. Botley studied their poisons. The Sakai uses poisons for his blow-pipes, arrows and baits and, of course, for the enemy who steals his food or his mate. There are a good many deadly poisons which the Sakais know and use and these are yet unknown to the Western world. Dr. Botley was immensely interested in toxicology and did a good deal of research work in some of these poisons, especially those which had no known antidotes. Barclay once told me that when he left Pahang he not only knew a good deal of the Sakai poisons himself but also had a good collection of some of the most virulent types. I believe he had them when he came to Perak.

"All this happened a good many years ago. Both Barclay and Dr. Botley have gone west and—"

"What! Dr. Botley dead?" asked Fulton, not fully interested.

"Yes. Botley met with a most horrible and agonising death—meddling with some of those infernal poisonous herbs during one of our trips to the interior. Barclay, Ali and I stood there helpless and saw him die—shrieking, writhing and tearing himself. We were so dazed and terror-stricken that we remained petrified to the ground. Imbeciles that we were! But what could we do? I tell you, Fulton, if I had the guts I would have shot him dead and ended his misery rather than have seen him suffer so inhumanely," ended Davy with a lump in his throat.

"But, dash it all, you couldn't have done that. I mean—it can't be done, you know."

"But why not? Wouldn't you shoot your dog if it were—"

"Yes. But a man—a friend?"

"Well, I don't know. As a famous K.C. once said: 'The springs of human motives are hidden from the eyes of man.' After all, it is only a question of elemental courage. Our civilisation, culture and all that have made us soft. Perhaps a man with more courage and less Western veneer would have done it," argued Davy, lighting a cigarette. In the light his face looked chalky and strained.

"Maybe," said Fulton, somewhat acquiescingly, "but perhaps in that type of man—let us say, a Malay—that finer emotion is lacking?"

"I am afraid, old chap, I can't agree with you there. This particular emotion or urge is not the produce of civilisation or outside culture—it is just original, elemental, and perhaps, even instinctive."

"Well—I don't know," said Fulton, showing open disagreement in his voice.

"Well—don't you?" said Davy, rather aggressively, standing up.

"I tell you, man," he continued in the same tone,

"I tell you, Fulton, Ali did it!"

"Did what?"

"Why, killed Barclay—shot him—"

"Of course, we all know that Ali murdered Barclay," said Fulton.

"Don't be an idiot! Ali didn't murder Barclay—he shot him to put an end to his horrible sufferings."

"What!" exclaimed Fulton, springing up.

"You mean to say Barclay was poisoned and died horribly like Botley? And Ali—"

"Exactly!"

"But who could have poisoned poor Barclay?"

"Well, I'll tell you—that is, not immediately. I prefer to start from the beginning. And shout for the boy, will you, Fulton, and order some beer," he said, reclining on his chair and stretching himself.

III

"Most people down here knew the Barclays as devoted couple and thought Alice a charming hostess and a model wife. But I knew that they were unhappy. Barclay always had a deep affection for his wife but Alice Barclay grew disillusioned and disappointed after a couple of years of quiet married life. Alice wanted glamour, night life, cards and the company of young men, but Jim Barclay in his later life was rather a domesticated beast. He certainly entertained friends, visited his club, played golf and all that, but he never cared for riotous company. He loved his home, his books and his wife beside him. But home meant nothing very much to Alice. She lost heavily at cards and Mal Jong and her tailors presented atrocious bills. Barclay paid her debts and bills without a word of reproof until she had an affair with a planter and caused an ugly scandal. Barclay sent her home to Surrey and hounded the planter out of the State."

"Who? O'Flynn?"

"Yes. But Barclay didn't bargain for what followed. O'Flynn chucked his job here and joined Alice at home. Alice repeatedly wrote for divorce but Barclay wouldn't hear of it and refused to supply the necessary evidence. Curiously enough he still loved his wife, and besides, he had to think of his prestige—a thing without which a 'pukka sahib' cannot show his face in the East. Seeing that things were drifting from bad to worse, Barclay went home himself. I believe a sort of 'rapprochement' was

established between them, for Barclay took Alice to Paris, Monte Carlo and toured the Continent. When they came back six months ago, they seemed to be real good friends and I, for one, hoped that this would continue for good. But ten days after their return Barclay was found dead—shot through the temple!”

“Good God!” exclaimed Fulton, mopping his damp brow. “And what came out in the Court?”

“Well,” said Davy, lighting another cigarette, “the case naturally created great stir among natives and Europeans alike. After the preliminary enquiry the case was committed to the Assizes. The D.P.P. prosecuted—perhaps ‘persecuted’ is the more correct word. The case for the prosecution was this: that on the night of the 27th July, the Barclays retired early—elevenish. A few minutes later the household was aroused by a shot. Mrs. Barclay rushed to her husband’s room and found that he lay dead—shot through the head—and Ali standing by his side with a smoking revolver in his hand. Having been caught red-handed he turned the gun on himself but wasn’t able to commit suicide. Mrs. Barclay immediately called in the other servants and phoned for the police. The motive, the prosecution alleged, was quite apparent. Ali had been given a month’s notice to leave by Barclay a few days ago; this had led to hot words between master and man on the fatal night (Alice’s evidence) and later Ali had taken his revenge.

“Counsel for defence argued that this was a very flimsy motive, but at the same time could not dis-

prove that Ali had shot Barclay. But he managed to cast some doubt on the veracity of the evidence given so far. Under fire of cross-examination the 'boy' No. 1 and the cook admitted that they had heard two shots in close succession instead of after a few minutes' interval as stated by Mrs. Barclay. Secondly, the alleged quarrel between Barclay and Ali was not substantiated by any other member of the household besides Alice. And lastly, Counsel for defence made a big coup when he elicited from Alice by devious questionings the fact that she was to receive £5,000 from an Insurance Company after her husband's demise. He further quoted several instances of Ali's devotion to and sacrifices for his master and ended with an eloquent appeal for mercy. During the whole proceedings the accused didn't speak a word and refused to answer any questions.

"His Lordship the Chief Justice then directed the Assessors in no uncertain measure. They retired for ten minutes and returned the verdict of 'Culpable homicide not amounting to murder.' The accused was thereupon sentenced to fifteen years' R. I."

"But what about the story of the poison and all that?"

"Yes, I am coming to that. What I told you now is what the public knows. What I am about to relate now are the facts of the case known only to me and a couple of other people. The whole diabolical plot was well thought out by Alice long before the event took place. From the very first she decided to fasten the crime on Ali and so prepared to create a motive.

"To this end she got Barclay, very much against

his will, to serve Ali with a notice of dismissal on the grounds that he was treating her with scarce attention and great disrespect. You see, Fulton, the fact was that Ali couldn't treat her otherwise knowing all about Alice and her treatment of Barclay. In fact, he hated her for making his 'Tuan so unhappy.

"Alice thought that Ali's dismissal, coupled with the 'violent quarrel'—an invention of hers—would supply a strong motive. The next move was quite easy. She could, without suspicion, remove some poison from Barclay's locked cupboard and administer it in the 'night cap' which Ali always served his 'Tuan before he went to bed.

"So when Barclay would be discovered dead the next morning—poisoned with a Sakai poison—why, it could easily be proved that Ali was the one guilty of this heinous offence. What she didn't know, however, was that this particular poison left no trace that could be detected by a European doctor. And had Ali not intervened, for reasons which will be obvious later, Barclay's death would have been certified 'due to sudden heart failure' and there the matter would have ended. But Fate delights in twisting man's life into a tangle.

"Ali, as usual, took the drink—already poisoned by Alice—to Barclay's room at about 10.30 on that fatal night, and was about to retire when his 'Tuan bade his return after half an hour to make certain arrangements for the next day's trip to the Ulu (interior villages). So, when Ali came into Barclay's room at about 11 p.m., he stood rooted to the ground horrified at the sight which met his eyes.

"There was Barclay, half-thrown out of his bed, his whole frame agitated by violent convulsions, his blood-shot eyes staring out of their sockets and his hairs on end. For a few seconds Ali remained immobile, bereft of the use of his limbs. Then suddenly he understood—understood that his master had been poisoned—understood that he was past human aid. A mental picture arose in front of his eyes—a jungle clearing, a group of Tuans and himself standing round a form on the ground, twisting and convulsing most horribly just like his Tuan now—the death of Botley!

"Ali sprang forward and caught hold of Barclay's flailing arms but the victim only grew more violent. Ali was unable to help or alleviate. Then quite as suddenly the violence of the attack seemed to be passing. His limbs relaxed but a heavy sweat broke out and he breathed heavily. Ali dropped down on his knees and buried his head in his hands beside the bed. Barclay touched his head and muttered some unintelligible words. Ali looked up and saw Barclay's eyes resting on a photograph on the dressing-table. Ali fetched it and put it in Barclay's hands. He held it in his trembling fingers and drew it close and then, all at once, burst into tears.

" 'Tuan—oh! Tuan—what is it—what can I do?' broke out Ali, his face twitching. Barclay spoke in gasps:

" 'Ali—I loved—two persons—you—like my son and—Alice—my wife—but she has—poisoned me!'

"He fell back exhausted. 'Ali,' he said, almost

in a whisper—"Ali—save my wife—save her—I love—her—still."

"Ali turned away his face and held his master's hands in his own. A strangled cry from the bed startled him. A fresh attack seized the unfortunate Barclay. The convulsions now were terribly violent. Ali seized a decanter and tried to administer some brandy but not a drop could he push through those clenched teeth.

"The unfortunate man lay groaning and foaming at his mouth. Again the body arched itself in that extraordinary manner. Then suddenly something snapped in Ali's brain. He ran swiftly to the chest of drawers in the corner, drew out an army revolver and shot Barclay through the temple.

"Poor Barclay died immediately—relieved eternally of those inhuman agonies. Ali, in his remorse and bewilderment, turned the gun on himself to put an end to his life. But he only received a flesh wound in his right shoulder and fell down unconscious. When he opened his eyes again, he found himself in a police ambulance, handcuffed."

"Then why didn't Ali bring all this out in the trial?" said Fulton.

"Because," said Davy, somewhat brusquely, "because Ali vowed to respect Barclay's wishes to save his wife."

"Oh! Damn!" burst out Fulton, somewhat relieving his pent-up feelings.

"But how on earth did you know all this mean, the inside story?"

"Ali told me the whole story in hospital.

see, next to Barclay, Ali loved and respected me. I knew him since he was a little motherless kid."

"But as a police officer yourself, shouldn't you have brought out all this in the trial?" queried Fulton in a reproving tone.

"No! Blast you! I didn't learn the story as a police officer—I received it in confidence as a friend. Besides, what could I do? Look at the futility of the case."

"Futility?"

"Yes! Consider the case as it was represented. Overwhelming evidence against the accused. Ali's silence throughout the entire trial which many interpreted as a mute confession of guilt. What effect would my story have on a couple of unimaginative and starched assessors, already prejudiced, consciously or unconsciously, by the lurid and bloodthirsty comments in the local Press. Perhaps I shouldn't mention it, but the atmosphere in Court was ugly during the whole trial. The Judge down to the 'mata-mata' was out for Ali's blood. Fancy! a native killing a white man in cold blood! Fortunately for them they had enough evidence to hang him, only a clever lawyer saved Ali from the hangman's rope. Besides, this poison leaves no trace. An autopsy would perhaps have revealed nothing to the doctor's eye."

"Yet, you might have tried, you know," said Fulton scathingly.

"Yes, I suppose I should have tried but it would have been futile. And, pray, what would have become of me—me, an 'orang putih' butting in to

ave a native and put the halter round a white woman's neck? No, my boy, had I done that, you and the rest of the crowd all over the States would have treated me as a pariah—nay, worse—a leper!”

“Oh! you d——d coward!” almost shouted Fulton, and walked off in the night.

“Perhaps I am—perhaps I am,” muttered Davy to himself, sinking into the easy chair.

DEATH COMES ON THURSDAYS

MORTON, surnamed the "Story-Teller," was the oldest member of the Tanjong Club. In his younger days he was one of the "regulars", but now he attended the club only once a year, and that was on the occasion of the annual Inter-State Rugger. To Morton, Rugger was the only game worth a man's attention; in his time he had captained his college team at Oxford, and though his Rugger days were over, he could yet teach the younger set a thing or two about the game.

The name "story-teller" was affixed to him when he was a young man in the early thirties; a mining engineer who would trek to town once a week to play a rough game, consume an unsuspected quantity of whisky "stengalis" and regale his friends with his yarns and generally end up by getting uproariously tipsy and noisy.

In those days his stories were received with gasps of surprise or mild protests of incredulity, but always with an enthusiasm that amply reflected the "bonhomie" of the story-teller. It must be said, however, that Morton was a born story-teller. He held his audience in his grip, swept them off their feet and made them laugh or cry as the occasion demanded. The background of his tales was always the "glorious Malaya of the good old days" when there were few white men, but every one of whom was a hero of sorts or at least a he-man.

The last story Morton told his fellow-clubmen

was on the "anniversary match" five years ago. He was in glorious form and told us a marvellous tale of the East, but alas! the younger men of to-day were so unromantically hard-boiled and matter-of-fact that they winked at each other and pulled Morton's legs unmercifully when he finished his story that night. But he was an old-timer and not easily to be reckoned with. He held up his hands quietly and added a rider to the story, which put the lid on the whole thing and rendered the Philistines pathetically hors de combat.

This was his amazing story :

"Gentlemen, twenty-five years ago I acquired a mining concession west of the Pidji River, which you now know as the very prosperous Gelatine Tin Mines Company Limited. I was the Managing Director until about a couple of years ago when I retired.

"To-day I am considered an expert in this mining business, but in those days I knew nothing beyond my profession, which is electrical engineering. Incidentally, I had, at that time, two other small mines in the neighbourhood which were paying me handsomely. All these were acquired with some money left me by an uncle (whom I had never seen) who was a colonel in the Indian Army.

"I needed a mining engineer to work this new mine, which was opened up on a small scale, and to this end I advertised in the local and home papers. Couple of months later a young man turned up at my office, I don't know from where, for the job. He was a Frenchman—Lavelle—and had the necessary

experience and excellent credentials. He was the very man I wanted, and I engaged him on the spot.

"Let me describe him to you. He didn't look Frenchy—you know what I mean—spoke English without an accent and looked a Britisher every inch of him. He was a robust young fellow in the early twenties and stood six-two in his socks. He spoke so little that most people marked him down as an unsociable pig. His manners were brusque; he neither drank nor smoked and lived on one frugal meal a day. He seldom smiled, and when he did—well, I'd rather he didn't inflict his smile on me. You see, he had such bad pyorrhea that his gums were perpetually bleeding and—it was hideous! Well, all these things didn't worry me. I wanted a mining engineer and I had a good one too, as he proved himself to be in a few weeks' time, and I congratulated myself on nailing him down to \$300 a month.

"On the day I engaged him, I took him, after lunch, to his bungalow which was furnished and ready for him. He gave a cursory glance all round and said it was O.K., with him. I then took him to my other two mines and introduced him to Ferguson, my manager, and Mack, the man in charge of the power-house. He didn't care to chum up with them though they were the best of fellows.

"After tea at Ferguson's red-tiled bungalow I intended to return home for a bath and a 'stengah,' but Lavelle wanted to see the new mine. I wasn't keen on this, and told him that he could inspect it any old time during the week, but as the man was

rather insistent, I had to give in. Anyway, I hated doing the eighty-minute drive through dark, mosquito-infested rubber estates, and I took him round the mining site as quickly as I could.

"But that didn't satisfy him. He wanted a thorough inspection then and there; the place seemed to have a fascination for him. I got thoroughly fed up by now, and asked him to please himself and return by the company's van when he had finished.

"It was well-nigh dinner-time when the telephone bell rang frantically. I recognised Javelle's voice at once, but he spoke in a high-pitched, nervous staccato. I couldn't get him at first, but when I realised what he was trying to tell me, I stood stunned. It seemed one of my foremen was found dead deep down a disused mining-shaft. It was the first time that an accident of this nature had occurred in my mines, and the deceased, Ah Kow, was an old-timer, a very trusted man. My 'syce' had gone home, and so I took out my car and hurried there.

"They brought the body for me to see. I had expected to see a mangled and gory corpse, but imagine my surprise when I found the body without any bones broken or any signs of blood. The man was stone dead, but seemed to be sleeping rather than dead. No one seemed to know why or when he had fallen into the shaft.

"It was Javelle who found the body while looking round the mine. The only strange thing which I, as a layman, noticed about the body was that it was abnormally pale--almost sepulchral! I

rang up the police ambulance and had the body sent to the hospital.

"The result of the post-mortem astounded the medical officer. There were no injuries internal or external; all the organs were intact and nothing was wrong with the heart either. But there was little or no blood in the man who was alive and kicking about only a few hours before!

"The police investigations brought nothing to light, and the news of the mysterious death created a tremendous furore. The effect on my coolies was disastrous. The Chinese said that it was clearly the work of the 'Devil'. The Malays—it was the work of a Hantu (ghost or evil spirit). As a result I could not get anyone to work on the night-shift for love or money.

"The usual inquest was held. In the Coroner's verdict, the management was exonerated of all blame 'for failing to take proper precautions,' etc., etc.

"However, after a couple of weeks or so, the excitement abated and the people settled down to their work. Lavelle was very keen on his job and proved his worth within a couple of months. My mine put out the best output in Perak. I was beginning to congratulate myself on having acquired this mine and this engineer when exactly after ten weeks of Ah Kow's death another such accident happened!

"This time it was a young Malay apprentice. The death took place under exactly similar conditions, at the same place and at about the same time. The autopsy revealed the same results, and the

Coroner's verdict was the same, but the effect was quite different. The police sat up and took notice. They posted a constable on duty day and night and the C.I.D. paid surprise visits and watched the men.

"The Malays resigned en masse and the Chinese coolies were wavering, badly frightened and nervous. Of course, I didn't blame them at all. Even the European staff got nervy and disgruntled and everything was out of gear. There were highly-strung articles, criticisms, opinions and theories in the papers.

"Matters became worse when a well-educated Malay gentleman of repute strongly asserted that these mysterious deaths or murders were the work of a monster vampire bat, and quoted examples of such happenings in certain parts of Malaya and Java. He even went further to advise doctors to scrutinise the body (should there be another unfortunate victim) for tiny punctures on the skin.

"The Chinese coolies, however, were down on Lavelle, heaven knows why. Their grouse was that he was the harbinger of all the ill-luck, and as such he must be removed. They admitted grudgingly that he in no way was responsible for this macabre affair, but still—well, you know, the Orientals have their kinks.

"Of course, I wouldn't hear of all this d——d nonsense and gave them no quarter. But the situation took a serious turn when they threatened to strike if Lavelle wasn't sent away within forty-eight hours. At first I refused to give in; I could

afford to keep the mine closed for a few days, but Ferguson and Mack advised me not to accede to the request of the coolies.

"They argued that if once the mine was closed down, it would never be worked again. It would be marked down as 'haunted' and no one would come near it. Besides, they added, I could give Lavelle a holiday or 'lend' him to some other mine until things quietened down.

"I saw the force of their arguments and so decided to remove him from this mine. I didn't want to take the risk of losing this 'find' of mine, and so I transferred him to my other group of mines and brought Mack over here. This arrangement seemed to please everyone except, of course, Lavelle. I didn't blame him either. But he had the decency not to grouse.

"Friends, the East is a curious place. When there is trouble or misfortune in any place or community, the stranger always gets it in the neck. He is the Jonah, and therefore virtually thrown overboard. When eventually he leaves and the calamity subsides, his guilt is still more pronounced. The change in the tide of affairs is consequently attributed to his absence. Q. E. D.

"The same thing happened in the case of Lavelle. Since he left for his new location the mysterious accidents in this mine stopped entirely. But, contrary to expectations, in the eyes of the Asiatic staff, the absence of these deaths now served only to prove conclusively their suspicions of Lavelle. They threatened to manhandle him severely if ever he

dared to set his foot there. But we felt no alarm on that score, for Lavelle never stirred out of his bungalow.

"Gentlemen, permit me to repeat, the East is a curious place. Yes, it has its influence even on us white people, level-headed and singularly unimaginative as we are. It makes us imagine fantastic things and believe in the most untenable theories.

"You will not, therefore, blame me perhaps when I tell you that after a few months I fully believed that Lavelle had something to do with all these beastly deaths! What else could I do?

"For, six months after his transfer to the new area, a similar type of fatal accidents started! And the curious thing about it all was that these deaths occurred with startling persistency---once every four weeks. Despite the vigilance of the police, the mine staff, both Asiatic and European, and sundry other interested and frightened parties, every fourth Thursday grim Death visited us in the mine.

"And, strange to say, Lavelle wasn't in the least worried or concerned in this affair. But, what is more difficult to explain, he was present at each of these 'accidents', and we felt that, somehow or other, his was a sinister influence.

"Things came to a head when, after the third death at the new mine, Lavelle was assaulted by the Chinese coolies and beaten to an inch of his life. The ringleaders were jailed and Lavelle spent six weeks in the hospital.

"You realise, gentlemen, that after an insult of this nature it was not possible for Lavelle to work in

my mine any more. But, would you believe it, he didn't seem to realise this. But my mind was made up. I determined to get rid of him to save my mine from utter ruin, and besides, dash it all, one had to think of the Orang Puteh's prestige, even if the phlegmatic Frenchman didn't.

"The snag was, of course, that I couldn't give him any cogent reason for his dismissal. But I decided to part as friends at any cost, for I felt that he was a dangerous man, and that there was a lurking volcano behind his cool grey eyes.

"So I decided to pick him up one day and drive him to town, where in the sanctum of my office I would explain the situation to him and hand him a handsome cheque and thus get rid of him with ostensible regret.

"Ah, short-sighted and foolish man that I was! Little did I know what was in store for me. Thoughtlessly, I had chosen the fateful Thursday afternoon when another of these regular weird accidents was due to take place, and I realised it only too late, when we were half-way through the forest road. It was about six o'clock in the evening. My Malay syce was at the wheel, and I was seated at the back with Lavelle.

"All of a sudden I realised that the car was losing speed and swaying slightly; then to my intense horror I saw the syce slump over the steering wheel. Instinctively, I jumped over, pulled the hand brake and miraculously brought the car to a standstill on the verge of a mining pool thirty yards away from the road.

"I turned the syce over—he was stone dead! Horror-stricken, I turned round and—I was frozen stiff with fear when I saw that the back seat was empty. A cold sweat broke out on me and I lost all volition. Then a voice from nowhere spoke with startling clearness:

" 'Don't be afraid, Morton. It is quite all right; Lavelle isn't going to touch you.' Here the voice gave vent to a blood-curdling laugh. 'Years ago, I was a mining engineer in a very big mining concern. One Thursday afternoon I fell down a deep shaft, while on my tour of inspection, unobserved by anybody. My bones were broken to bits and internally I was horribly damaged.

" 'I was suffering Hell and bleeding profusely—bleeding to death and yet not a soul to help me. And then, a maddening thirst gripped me and I yelled for water or wine or any infernal liquid. After four hours of agony I died of hæmorrhage and dire thirst.

" 'Since then, once a month, every Thursday, I was consumed with a devastating thirst and this I found to my misery and damnation could only be quenched with human blood. Your unfortunate men have almost slaked my thirst with their hearts' blood and your syce is the last.

" 'My thirst is satisfied—I have found salvation. God in Heaven! I swear I will not bother you or any mortal man from now on. Good-bye!'

"The voice ceased and there was a rustling of leaves. Suddenly there was a gust of wind and a huge shapeless black mass flew past me and knocked

me down. This brought my motor nerve back to life and galvanised me into action.

"I jumped into the front seat, pushing the deasyce aside, and took the wheel. The engine throbbed instantly to response, and the next moment I was tearing along the road madly, as if Hell's hound were after me. An hour's hard driving brought me to town.

"With the din and bustle of a living city in my ears, my senses, which had almost left me, returned and I pulled up in front of my office with a harsh screeching of brakes that almost turned the car turtle. I rushed to my office and dropped off into a sort of stupor or dazed sleep. That, gentlemen, is about all."

There was a hushed silence in the club for a few seconds, and then a babel of protests and expletives broke out. The most unsporting attitude was shown to Morton, especially by the younger set. The older members knew better than to show open disbelief. Besides, they were used to Morton and his stories.

"Come, come, Morton, you don't expect us to swallow all this—er—rignarole in these enlightened days," exclaimed young McTavish rather hotly. The old-timers protested against this open thrust at Morton. It was no way to speak to the oldest member of the club.

Old Morton held up his hands with a tolerant gesture and said quietly :

"Gentlemen, allow me to add a postscript to this—er—curious story of mine. Those of you who have spent the greater part of your lives out in the

Just know that such things as have been related by me just now are possible and have happened in the days gone by.

"To the tribe of unbelievers I say—it is only a dream! Yes, I dreamt it all one night in a powerhouse twenty years ago, when I dozed off in front of a huge turbo-alternator developing fifteen thousand h.p. and humming a droning lullaby.

"Verbum sapienti sat est.

"Good night, gentlemen, and sleep well."

BABI, I,

My ship, a coastal tramp of two thousand odd tons plies between Burma and China—from Akyab to Hanchow. I am the ship's medico and second in command.

You may wonder that anyone so insignificant should have anything remotely interesting to relate. But I am not really insignificant, if you know what I mean. I hold medical degrees of three Universities—Edinburgh, Vienna and Pisa and am a gold medallist to boot. Now you say to yourself: "Why then is this genius rotting in this odd corner of the world?" Half a dozen answers spring to your lips— a shattered romance, a fugitive from justice, unprofessional conduct, drink or, is it—?

No, you are wrong, not within a hundred miles of the truth. And now perhaps you are interested in me.

I started life in one of those huge round-the-world luxury liners—a fine cushy job carrying a salary of £800 per annum and all told. But I left the job after the second trip. As a matter of fact the ship's people wouldn't let me go; they were fond of me. I deserted ship at Singapore. You don't believe me?

No, I can see that smile on your face. And yet your heart will soften when I tell you that the reason for this singularly unconventional behaviour of mine was mainly—**ESCAPE!**

Yes, escape from the babel of ship's passengers—

the incessant, meaningless, sophisticated, poisonous and fatuous prattle. I hated it all; it wrecked my nerves.

Passengers are curious people. For some mysterious reason, to most of them, the ship's doctor is an enigmatical and romantic person; a blend of friend, philosopher and guide; one who is expected to receive their confessions and secrets and keep these in the innermost recesses of his soul and yet should be sporty enough to "release" the spicy bits entrusted by past confidants for the amusement of his present and future guests on board ship; one who is expected to listen to their spiritual and physical complaints with a perpetual grin and dispense physic with a magic touch. Verily—an unhappy person notwithstanding his smiles and his immaculate starched suit.

The blue stories of men, the heartless flirtations of married women, the thinly veiled amorous exploits of scantily clothed and "supercharged" modern young things, the morbidity of sexless spinsters—these leave a bitter taste in the mouth, after a time. I am no prude but temperamentally I was unfit. What was more, I wanted to explore places off the beaten track and study life in the raw.

In a small boat, especially in a coastal tramp, you are free from all these torments and tribulations. My boat was essentially a cargo vessel that carried only third class passengers, mostly Chinese. I don't understand their lingo and the greatest blessing is that I don't have anything to do with them except professionally. I don't have to mix or talk shop

with them. But this does not mean that they are a quiet lot. A Celestial can be as silent as a tomb for days on end but if he wants to talk—well, no one on earth can beat him at that. Generally speaking, the third class passengers, once they have sorted themselves out into groups, they talk incessantly. But that's no worry, for you get used to them as the rumble of the waves or the throb of the engines. After a time, you simply don't notice the babel; you only see groups of gesticulating people, moving their lips and contorting their faces—a composite picture.

Thus it was one day after leaving Malacca I was taking a turn on the deck when I happened to look towards the deck passengers. There was the usual crowd—lolling, squatting, gesticulating, shouting and spitting. A typical picture yet there was something that disturbed the composition, something foreign but not quite out of element. I looked over the crowd and soon discovered the recalcitrant factor.

In a corner, partially hidden by a pile of canvas, a man sat leaning against the funnel of a deck ventilator, his legs stretched full out with arms akimbo and his head sunk on his chest. He was either dozing in the sun or he was lost in thought. Nothing very unusual, all this, but he seemed somehow different and isolated from the rest. He was dressed à la mode China—in an old suit of pale green Shantung silk; but that he was not a Chinese struck me the moment I set my eyes on him. He had a grizzled beard and long, unkempt, ginger hair. I was gazing intently at him, when prompted by a sixth sense probably, he suddenly lifted his head, turned round

and caught my stare. I felt embarrassed and discomfited. The man's eyes smouldered like burning coal. As I was about to turn away, he gave a smirk, and resumed his reverie.

* * *

It was after four bells the next day that the Purser knocked at my door.

"Afraid you will have to go down to the deck, Doc. Bad case," he muttered. Bryant was an efficient officer but was a man of few words unlike any other Eurasian I have come across.

"What, someone got a knife into his guts?" I asked half seriously, half jokingly, for nothing was impossible 'down below.'

"Nope—nothing so exciting. Man howling with pain in tummy. Ptomaine poisoning or something," he said walking away.

"D——d Chinks. Always swallowing rubbish," I muttered angrily to myself, annoyed at being disturbed at my crossword.

I spotted my patient immediately. He was none other than the man whom I had "discovered" yesterday. The man lay huddled, doubled up with pain, clutching his stomach and groaning. His eyes were closed and his face livid.

I turned him over to examine him but the man swore at me in Russian, "Get out—go away, you—fool!" he almost yelled. The foul language, the unprovoked outburst, his obvious distrust in my medical skill, got my goat. I beckoned to a couple

of stalwart lascars, and ordered them to hold the man's arms and legs. The man shrieked and struggled like a maniac but though a giant he was in his present condition he was as weak as a woman. I tore open his jacket and examined him. It was an emaciated body that showed signs of great physical strain and on his left shoulder, there was the mark of an old scar, of the "Scarlet Pimpernel" type. I diagnosed it as a bad case of colic. I advised him to lay down quietly and promised to send down some medicine. The man's only answer was a foul retort. I turned round and almost kicked him but I got my grip on myself in time and walked away, quivering in every limb.

After dispensing the medicine I retired to my cabin, washed my hands and gulped down a stiff one. The man's unaccountable animosity disturbed me. Even in his present wretched condition, there was a trace of distinction about the man with his eagle eyes, his high forehead, and above all, the rasping voice that cut the air like a rapier. From the Purser I found that the man was listed as "Robinson" but he was a Russian undoubtedly. I put him down as one of the many flotsam and jetsam that have drifted down East after the Revolution.

II

The man died in the early hours next morning. He had a raging temperature and became unconscious and delirious four hours before his death. Most of his ravings was unintelligible incoherent outbursts in Russian. I caught a few words which he repeated at frequent intervals. "Fool—fool—Peter Vladymitch—Maria—Nadya—bitch—whore."

A man doesn't die of colic this way and so I held a post mortem. I found a quantity of poison in his stomach—a type of 'curari' used by the head hunters of Borneo. It was a clear case of suicide. He had turned down my professional help savagely. He did not want to live. He wanted to take his life deliberately and wanted no interference.

Who was this strange forgotten cast-off derelict? Why had he taken his life under such strange circumstances? And why this animosity towards me? His only belonging was a battered suitcase. There was nothing in it to reveal his identity or disclose his history. His wallet contained \$9 odd and a faded-out photograph of a young couple and a child. We were still four days from Brunei. The Captain ordered his burial at sea. His battered suitcase and wallet went down with him. But I kept the faded photograph.

III

Five weeks later my boat berthed at our destination. After discharging its cargo of coconut sago and spices, it was to be docked for small repairs. The Captain gave me ten days off.

Hanchow is a smudgy little hole much too provincial for a man of my taste. Besides I was developing into a bit of a gay dog in my late forties. So I packed up my glad rags and went to Shanghai for some fun, to get drunk and maybe pick up a gal.

One night I rolled up to the "Happy Valley Cabaret" which was the rendezvous of the better class sailor and gentleman about town. A coloured couple were doing a turn which almost resembled a furious "all in" wrestling bout; one felt as if watching a deed of violence. The music was bizarre and deafening, "simply murdering silence with a vulgar ferocious energy." Fortunately the act ended earlier than I had expected. There was relief in the air. People sighed and relaxed. Next came a dark lanky Filipino with a gleaming saxophone, who sobbed out a haunting melody and as the music reached a sentimental pitch, a woman glided on to the stage. The saxophone stopped. All eyes turned on the newcomer. She was a "white" woman, with a pale alabaster complexion, raven black hair and mid-night blue eyes. She walked across the stage with a slow rhythmic gait, swinging her hips and smoking a long gold-tipped cigarette. She stopped by the saxophonist who had by now started vamping on a minor key. The focus light fell full on her;

her dark diaphanous dress revealed her contours which though far from virginal, were pleasing to the eye of a man of my age. Eyes strained forward and people spoke in hushed voices. She started singing to the accompaniment of the music. Her voice was low and husky. The words were English but she was no Britisher or American; her accent betrayed her. She was a Continental, probably a Slav.

"So this is 'Tiger Lily'!" exclaimed someone at my back. I started. Tiger Lily! Was this then the notorious woman whose amorous adventure was the topic of discussion in every saloon and bar from Port Said to Vladivostock? A woman who had suddenly turned up at Sumatra a few years ago; no one knew from where, and started her devastating career with such éclat that made people sit up. Some said she was a Russian emigrée; others whispered that she was an adventuress, an international spy. A dangerous woman who, like an avalanche, had swept and crushed everyone that had come in contact with her. She had reduced millionaires to penury, driven fat and paunchy middle-aged men crazy, robbed women of their tested and staid husbands and wrecked happy homes—a menace to every society.—White, Brown or Yellow. Even now, after all these years of hectic life she looked disturbingly beautiful.

My reverie was broken by a thunderous applause. Her song was over. She was coming down the aisle. Men stood up and cheered her and offered her champagne. She laughed and chatted, took a sip of wine here and a bonbon there. When she passed

the tables of old patrons and friends, she would sit down and listen amiably to the bantering talk of young bucks or smilingly receive the amorous propositions of old roués. My blood tingled with excitement. Would this glamorous creature give me her company? No, she went past me mere with a nod and a smile. Damnation! I realised. I was fat and forty. When I looked round, I found her settled down with some people three tables behind me.

It was nearing mid-night. As there was nothing doing here, I decided to adjourn. To reach the exit, I had to pass the table where the woman was sitting. I had almost crossed over when someone at that table caught my wrist in a vice-like grip and exclaimed, "Jumping Jupiter! if it isn't Doc McDougall!"

I flashed round, astonished. "Zees! Ken Sommervildt!" I exclaimed, discovering that the companion of the Tiger Lily was none other than the famous millionaire playboy of New York whose astounding pranks had startled even a hard-boiled American public. Ken would cross the Pacific or take a trip to the Congo with less thought than a Londoner setting out for Brighton. He was my passenger several times in the good old days and somehow or other we had got very friendly and comradely so much so that we always visited the sights and hit the high spots together. "Jim, you scoundrel. You were trying to cut me dead, eh? Fancy passing within a yard of my table and not noticing me!" he scoffed good-humouredly.

"Not that, Ken. Madam, your companion, is so dazzlingly beautiful that I had no eyes for you," I exclaimed gallantly, looking at Tiger Lily.

"Ah! you sly dog," answered Ken boisterously, "you want an introduction, hein? Maria, my dear, this is Doctor James McDougall—Mlle. Nadya Nimof," he completed the introduction with a courtly bow. "Be careful, Maria," he added with a mischievous twinkle, "Jim is an old sea dog—a pirate that roams the seven seas. See that he does not steal your heart!"

We talked and chatted and soon adjourned for supper to the "Red Dragon" which was famous for its chow and iced coffee. We took a taxi and Tiger Lily sat between us. Her proximity vaguely disturbed me. What was it about her that seemed familiar? Not her face or voice or eyes; something detached, yet close. As we crossed the bridge of Seven Sighs, I remembered suddenly. It was her name "Maria", "Nadya"! Had not the strange passenger repeated these names a hundred times in his delirium?

Yes, but what could a vagabond of that type have anything to do with this polished courtesan who moved with Sultans and Princes? Bah! a mere coincidence.

IV

Ken ordered a delicious Chinese supper soup, capon with mushroom, *bêche-de-roast* suckling pig. We sat in a private dining room and supped gaily. La Dame Tiger scintillating. I laughed and ate and jeered at them but the names "Maria", "Nadya" and the collection of my strange passenger, the woman surrounding this woman, disturbed me in a great deal. Was there a link between the two human wrecks? Did she hold the key to his? Again and again I said "Impossible!" but my voice prompted "Why not? Strange is the truth. Suddenly I made up my mind to find out the truth. Otherwise, for years to come this dead woman would torment me. I decided upon a bold experiment.

I turned grave and stopped taking part in conversation, assuming a faraway look in my eyes. It soon had the desired effect.

"Jimmy, old horse, are you looking at me?" banteringly challenged Ken. I shook my head gloomily and said with a melodramatic gesture,

"My friends, I am a thief. I stole the most cherished possession of a dead man!"

"A woman!" exclaimed Tiger Lily.

"Bravo!" guffawed Ken, slapping my shoulder.

"Nothing so romantic sometimes."

of the man but kept out his delirious ravings, forgot to mention his scar. Then as I finished I took the photo from an inner pocket and throwing it on the table face downwards exclaimed, "That is what I stole!"

Ken was the first to recover. He snatched up the photo, gazed at it curiously; then with a disappointing grunt, threw it down exclaiming "Ugh! You sentimental pumpkin!"

Smoking complacently, Nadya picked up the picture. I was watching her intently. Amazement swept over her features. The cigarette dropped from her lips. Her face changed colour, she ran forward and examined the picture under a strong light. Then with a moan she sank into the sofa and burst out into convulsive sobs, crying "Nana! Oh! my Nana!" Suddenly she ran forward and clutched the lapels of my coat. "Tell me, where is my little one---my Nana, my baby," she cried wildly.

"Your baby?" I stammered flabbergasted.

"Yes, yes, my own baby," she cried hysterically, kissing the photo of the child wildly. When she had somewhat quietened down, she remarked quietly, "Of course, how would you know?"

Now that a definite link was established, I was determined that the drama should be unfolded in full. "Does it mean," I asked pointing to the woman in the photo "that this is you?"

expression changed violently. She clutched her hands and a convulsion shook her frame. Her eyes shone malignantly and stamping her foot, she exclaimed in a voice vibrating with passion: "That—that is Serge. Impostor, swindler, schwein-hund! The devil incarnate who ruined me and made me what I am to-day." She was totally unstrung—a pathetic sight. She lay huddled in the couch, all in a heap. Ken held a decanter at her mouth and forced a few drops down her throat.

I was beginning to feel guilty of having so rudely disintegrated a beautiful woman's complacency and exposed her sangfroid but the East had hardened me and I was determined to wrest the whole truth out of her. Fortunately for all concerned, I didn't have to dig her.

She sat up suddenly with the air of one who has made up one's mind to do something drastic.

"I need a pick-me-up," she said with a wan smile. Ken, good cavalier that he was, soon fetched a double cognac. She gulped down some of the drink. The colour came back to her cheeks. She regained her poise to some extent. She looked us squarely in the face and said in an almost natural voice, "Friends, I am going to unburden my soul and tell you the story of my life." Finishing her drink, she started:

"I was brought up in the lap of luxury. My father was the famous artillery expert, Colonel Charles Nimof. My mother came of a family of rich landlords and was distantly related to the Grand Duke Alexis. Serge was a dashing young lieutenant

in my father's regiment. He was a frequent visitor to my father's country seat where we resided more or less permanently. My brother and he were good friends and classfellows and my father was godfather to Serge. My mother was an invalid, a martyr to rheumatism. My father usually lived in town. As a result of all this, Serge and I were thrown together a great deal and as a matter of course I fell in love with him. It must have been infatuation for I was only seventeen and just out of Convent. Serge was twentyone, gay, debonair and rich. One evening we had strayed far into a neighbouring forest and there in a deserted hunting lodge, he seduced me.

"My mother, though bedridden, was a stern matriarch. She ruled the household from her bed and her illness seemed to have intensified her powers of observation and perception. Besides she was gifted with a strong intuition that astonished and sometimes alarmed the household. Her keen eyes soon discovered that something was wrong with me and with her stern insistence, she soon bullied the truth out of me.

"A few weeks later she summoned Serge. I don't know what exactly took place behind the closed doors but when Serge came out of my mother's room his gay insouciance had left him and he looked like a wet puppy. That night before dinner my mother sent for me and said in a matter of fact voice: 'Serge will marry you—soon.' I was dumbfounded. I stormed and raged and wept. 'I will not marry Serge, mother. I do not love him.'

"'You should have thought of that before,' she said mockingly. 'Listen, Nadya, you have been a little fool. I will forgive all but not a nameless brat!'

"I recoiled, as if struck a blow.

"'Don't, mother, don't you...!'

"She stopped me with a stern gesture and asked me to leave the room.

"Alas! I soon discovered that I was with child. My father suspected nothing, gruff soldier that he was. He liked Serge and that was all that mattered.

"We were married within a month. It was a quiet wedding; I wouldn't have liked it otherwise. We spent our honeymoon in the Balkans. Serge came back a different man. He felt that he had been cheated out of life and deeply resented having been forced into a marriage and consequently saddled with a wife at an age when one was licensed to sow one's wild oats and have a good time. He despised me.

"Nana was born on Michaelmas. Strangely enough, Serge became strongly attached to the child. In fact she seemed to be the only link between me and Serge.

"The destiny of Russia was soon to change. Dark clouds were gathering over the horizon; there was the writing on the wall, ominous whispers and sinister threats. The Bolsheviki lion has reared its head. The nobility sensed the impending danger but their inborn sangfroid and race arrogance, the false estimation of their already decadent powers, and their supreme contempt for the peasantry, lulled them into a false sense of security.

"Suddenly the storm broke out—furious, merciless, blood-thirsty. Serge and I collected our handy valuables and with the aid of old and trusted servants, got out in time. After that we lived like hunted rats for months escaping from place to place. One night we took refuge in a barn. The next morning when I awoke, I found myself alone. Serge and the baby had disappeared! There were no signs of a struggle. It was a cold-blooded desertion. I was at the mercy of the Bolsheviki.

"I made no further attempts to escape. My soul was bruised. I had neither money nor friends. There was absolutely no fight left in me. At noon I was captured. My captor was a huge big fellow with a ginger coloured beard and a gruff voice—probably an Ukrainian. He neither slapped my face nor tormented me. He merely tied my hands and led me along. On the way I wept bitterly. The man looked round with a contemptuous look in his eyes and barked out, 'Don't be a coward, woman.' I told him, between my tears, of my baby—my Nana. I begged him, 'Do what you like with me but first find me my child.' I wept and howled, moaned and cajoled, threatened and stormed foolishly but he kept a wooden silence. I knew it was hopeless. A Bolshevik has no heart.

"We had reached the outskirts of the woods when we heard the thud of galloping hoofs. A group of horsemen was heading towards us. Suddenly my captor seized me and lifting me bodily, ducked under the culvert of a bridge. When the posse disappeared, we came out of hiding and squatted on the rank grass.

The horsemen were Bolsheviks. Why then had a captor behaved so strangely?

"Friends, I have always scoffed at the word 'miracle,' but wonder of wonders, one happened now; my enemy turned friend and instead of taking me to the guillotine, led me to freedom. After three days of hard riding, we reached the Ukrainian border. Here he handed me over to some of his friends. 'My comrades will see you safely out of Russia. After all is over, I will see you wherever you are. I am Peter Vladymitch. Have courage little one,' he said bidding me farewell.

"His mysterious friends spirited me out of the danger zone into Germany. After two months I found myself in Paris—friendless but not stranded for I had my jewels and my benefactors had left me a well-filled purse.

"The maelstrom had scattered the Russian nobility to the four corners of the earth. Among the emigré population in Paris I soon came across many known faces. From them I heard that my father had committed suicide, my mother guillotined and Serge killed in a duel. My Nana? Alas! No one knew of her whereabouts.

"I lived an empty life. During the day I worked as a mannequin. At night I dreamt of Peter Vladymitch and wept for Nana.

"Four years passed in this fashion. One day, as I was about to go out for a drive, my maid-of-all-works announced a visitor who would not give his name. 'Who can it be?' I asked surprised, for I had seldom any visitors. 'He looks a provincial,

"Le garçon, madam," said my maid with a perceptible sniff. Before I could answer, there stood framed in the doorway Peter Vladymitch! Peter—gaunt, lean and slightly stooping. I stood paralysed until he said, "Little woman, have you waited for me?" I crept into his arms and sobbed.

"We had fifteen days of heaven during which we got secretly married. Peter was now a People's Commissar. He promised to return before the year was out and then settle down with me somewhere far from the maddening crowd."

"From that time life for me was different. I had something to live for. But I was unaware of a dark sinister fate that dogged my footsteps. One day I was having an omelette and coffee in a café in Rue de Mars—one of the many establishments started by Russians—when I came face to face with a ghost. Serge! Serge, 'dark and sinister, smiling malevolently, with a deep sabre cut that stretched across his right cheek. The encounter was so shocking that I was bereft of all volition and speech. When I recovered I thought I would spit on him but then when I remembered Nana, I smiled instead. He said Nana was living and well but where and how he would not disclose. He promised to take me to her provided I was 'good to him.' Oh! foolish woman that I was! He proceeded systematically to sponge me dry. I protested. He soon adopted different tactics. He had found out how I had escaped and through what agency. He threatened to expose Peter and blackmailed me with this trump card in his hand. I suffered in silence and parted

with my jewellery one by one. The climax came when he wanted me to live with him. I had reached the end of my tether. I told him I was married to Peter and, what was more, I loved him. He exploded violently and swore to take his revenge by exposing Peter. I told him to do his worst.

"He did. I found this out after about three months when one day I received mysteriously a cutting from a Russian paper which contained the dreadful news that Peter Vladymitch was sentenced to ten years' hard labour by the People's Court for 'having committed a deep offence against the State in that he aided and abetted in the escape of a political prisoner'. I was stunned and dazed. Ten years! I knew what that meant. He would never come out alive.

"What is the use of continuing my tale further? I had nothing to live for. My friends, I determined to forget everything and wipe out the past. I was conscious of my beauty, my youth and sex appeal. I knew their 'value.' I decided to exploit these. I led a gay, senseless, vapid life; soon I drifted—drifted down the path of easy virtue. But what does it matter? I had forgotten the past—until to-night!"

The finish of her story brought a chasm of silence in the room. I felt guilty of having caused a woman to lay bare her soul—naked, ugly. I hadn't bargained for this. Ken felt badly shaken.

Neither of us spoke. Nadya broke the spell by lighting a cigarette and offering us her case. I felt her jewelled hand on my sleeve. I turned round and looked at her kindly.

"Tell me, what was your passenger like?"

This time I described him in full, mentioning his scar. She bowed her head and said in a weary voice, "Yes, that was Peter Vladymitch. His prison days are over. And yet," she asked in a bewildered tone, "and yet, he took his life when I was only a few hundred miles away—so near him. Why, why?" she ended hysterically.

Why? Ah! Foolish woman! Was not the story of the 'Tiger Lily known throughout the East? How could Peter Vladymitch, who must have roamed a great deal in search of her, escape hearing it all? I looked at Ken. He nodded almost imperceptibly. We men—we understood.

"Did he—er—did Peter speak of me before his death?" she asked falteringly.

His last words "Fool — Peter Vladymitch—Maria—Nadya—bitch—whore" rang accusingly in my ears. But what right had I to betray the last message of agony and anguish of a dying man?

I shook my head and replied calmly, "No—he was unconscious."

KISMIH

DOLLAH was indeed a notable figure in the little village of Kampong Pisang, on the bank of the Krian river. Of course, "Dollah" wasn't his name but that was what he was called by all and sundry—from the half-naked village urchins to the more sedate Pengulu and the Katli. To strangers, however, he introduced himself as "Syed Abdullah bin Rahman" with an air of old-fashioned solemnity, for was he not a descendant of the Prophet?

As for me, I had always called him "Dollah," for I knew him ever since I was a kid—ever since he was engaged as the "tindal" of my uncle's rubber estate quite a quarter of a century ago. Times have changed; a giddy boom came and swept people off their feet and senses; then came the dark slump and crushed them mercilessly. But Dollah remained with us.

In my teens, I very often met him and loved his genial company. He poured into my eager ears weird tales of genii and witches and later on maturer stories of love and hate and war of the early days of Malaya before the Whiteman set his foot. In this way there sprang up between us a sort of friendship or, shall I say, camaraderie? He treated me with an air of indulgence and patronage, which I suppose is the privilege of an old and trusted servant of the family. Even now, though I am virtually his boss and "Tuan Kitchi," he occasionally slaps my back and pulls my legs with great pleasure. Dollah was.

now fifty-one, placid and garrulous, the father of five children, but to me he looked just as when I first met him—with the exception of some betraying grey hairs which crept furtively out of his cap.

About a year back, I went to the estate on a business-cum-pleasure visit. Dollah was at the motor-car stand to receive me, with his palm umbrella and his ancient pipe stuck in his mouth. He talked and laughed as usual, for he was genuinely happy to see me, but something odd about him struck me the moment I saw him. He seemed to have grown ten years older since I saw him last and some slow imperceptible change had come over him. However, I pretended not to have noticed this but determined to find out later what troubled poor Dollah. After we had finished the business and the less pleasant part of the visit, Dollah took me to the attap cottage where he lived. We seated ourselves in two old cane chairs under a large shady mangosteen tree.

"Will you have some coffee, Tuan Kitchi, or young cocoanut?" asked Dollah.

"I think I would rather have a young cocoanut," I said feeling a parched throat.

"Mina!" he shouted to his wife, "the Tuan Kitchi is here."

His wife, who looked older than he, came and saluted me in the native way. She was always sickly and bored but a glance at her would convince even the most fastidious of men that she had been an extremely pretty woman in her time.

"Come on! there is no need to stand grinning

"You unmannerly woman! serve your Tuan yourself," Dollah growled at her.

"Don't be silly! we are strong enough to help ourselves," I said, thanking Mina, who was walking off towards the well. She seemed to have grown quite accustomed to the outbursts of her husband.

I was munching the hard "pulut" cakes and sipping the refreshing drink when Dollah said, "Tuan, am getting old, you know, and I think it is time that go to Mecca for my pilgrimage."

"Of course! If you really want to go, I will make arrangements. But, look here! Dollah, why this sudden decision?"

"As I told you, I am getting old," he said gravely.

"Dollah! we have always been friends in a way—tell me, what is worrying you; something seems to have upset you?"

He rolled up a native cigarette slowly and with great deliberation, and having lit it, puffed reflective clouds of smoke into the air.

"Tuan, I have been thinking of my youth," he said haltingly.

"Thinking of your youth? What of it?"

"What of it?" he said with a bitter smile, "what of it? Listen, Tuan!" he said, looking me straight in the face with the air of a man who had made a sudden decision.

"In my youth, I committed a great indiscretion—crime. The thoughts of that have assailed my conscience, or what is left of it, and I find no peace, Tuan. I have told you many a story in the days

gone by but I will tell you one now the like of which you have never heard—only, after this, you will never think of me as you used to. I beg you, don't judge me rashly."

The mute appeal in his eyes and the pathos of his voice made me look away from him.

"In my young days, I was not at all what you would imagine me to have been. I was wild, impetuous, rash, careless of consequence—a firebrand. I was the dismay of my parents and terror of those who were unfortunate enough to incur my displeasure. I was not really bad, Tuan, only I always did what I wanted to and got what I desired at any cost. It is in the blood, Tuan, if you remember the story of my grandfather I told you some years back.

"My father lived in those days in Pahang when one never saw a motor car or a train or electric lights. He was a landowner with enough paddy, rubber and buffaloes to keep my two brothers and myself in good comfort and some luxury. Our neighbour was a landowner who was rich beyond our comprehension. But though we were comparatively so poor, my mother was a great friend of his wife and there was always friendly relations between the two families.

"Che'zin had an only child—a daughter about the same age as myself. I was ten and she was eight. As can be expected from two friendly neighbours their children became friends. When she played with me she always behaved as a boy. I taught her how to shoot birds with catapults and to make bamboo blow-pipes and to spin a top on the palm of her hand.

"This innocent idyll went on for two years when my father decided to send me to Lipis, a town about fifty miles from our home, to study in the Government Malay School. I went there and lived with my aunt for five years. In those days, Tuan, one had to travel on foot through jungle-paths and by boats through dark mosquito-infested rivers. For this reason I came home but once during these five years. When I was seventeen I passed my Final Malay Examination and came home like a conquering hero, for in those days, there were none with such qualifications in our kampong.

"Several days had passed after my return, but I neither saw nor heard of the friend of my childhood. I soon found out from Din, our old gardener, that she was quite well but that now she had 'come of age' and hence did not come out of doors as before. However, one day, I went over with my mother to Che'zin's house and there I met her.

"Tuan, I stood with my mouth wide open when I saw her first—such was my surprise at the happy change that time had wrought on her. She was no longer a frolicking child but a beautiful maiden, demure and blushing! She wasn't so free with me as before and I felt hurt; but another day, while recounting the adventures of our childhood I reminded her of an incident how once, trying to shoot a sparrow with a catapult, we hit an old man on the head instead, and how he chased us; how she fell into a ditch and I dragged her out! When she heard this, she laughed as before and her eyes sparkled. 'Look here, Dollah,' she said mischievously, 'why not we

try shooting again?' 'Yes! why not?' said I, and running home, brought an old catapult.

"We went to the extensive fruit garden behind her house and for practice shot at 'jambu' fruits. Suddenly she whistled softly and tugged at the sleeves of my baju. I saw a multi-coloured gorgeous bird—a Malayan wood-pecker probably, sitting on a rumbutan tree. 'You must shoot that for me,' she whispered. Standing about ten yards away I took a good aim and released the stone of the catapult. Before I knew what had happened I saw her sinking to the ground with a moan. The stone had missed the bird, struck a branch and rebounding, hit her forehead. I bent down and caught her in my arms. It was a bad cut and I was frightened. I took out my handkerchief and was dressing her wound when I noticed tears in her eyes. It must have hurt her terribly and her tears upset me. I didn't know what happened next—I pressed her in my arms and kissed her madly! She lay in my arms quietly and responded to my caresses.

"Tuan, life after that was different. I felt stronger, bigger, happier. The fact was, I was in love, and, what was more, she loved me. For fear of betraying our new affection, we seldom met openly, but compensated that by having secret trysts in the fruit garden.

"This heaven of happiness went on for some time till I looked upon herself as mine—mine, body and soul. But it is the strange rule of Kismet that paths of true love should never run smoothly. About

this time, there came a letter to my father from some 'orang puteh' who was in charge of Malay schools, inquiring if I would care to accept the post of a Malay teacher in an elementary vernacular school in a town some eighty miles from our kampong. My father felt proud that I should be singled out for a job under Government and told me that I should accept it. The idea appealed to me but it meant leaving the girl I loved. However, I did go.

"I returned after about a year when the school closed for vacation and I arrived home late at night. The next morning I woke early and was sipping my coffee when I noticed that the large compound of my neighbour was full of Indian coolies and Chinese carpenters. The compound was being cleaned, hedges clipped and huge stands with attap roofs erected. Clearly, some function was to take place and unable to control my curiosity any longer, I went over to Che'zin's house. 'Hullo, Dollah!' said the old man Che'zin to me. 'Glad that you are here - don't forget the "kunduri" and, look here, young man, you must help us in all these arrangements.' Of course, I would be glad to help him, I said, but : 'First of all, what are these arrangements for?' I inquired, looking round.

" 'Oh I see, you must have just come back not to have heard the news - you will be glad to hear that your friend, my daughter, is getting married to a very . . . ' I did not hear the rest of the sentence—I stood suddenly bereft of my senses and felt as one struck by lightning. I don't know how long I stood there like that, but when Che'zin touched my shoulders

and said, 'Why! what is the matter with you?' I suddenly turned back and ran home. After some time, when I fully realised that my beloved was to be married and that very soon, I became like a raving madman. I cursed and swore and contemplated murder. I thought I would revenge myself now on the father, now on the girl, and now on the bridegroom whose name and existence I did not know of.

"Che'zin's daughter had seen me that morning and that night I met her. I thought I would strangle her to death but when she lay in my arms, sobbing and protesting that she loved me, I hated her no more—only tears rolled down my own eyes. Tuan, when tears come from the eyes of a strong man, know that it is not helplessness but sheer desperation. Poor girl! She was not to be blamed. It is the custom, Tuan, among the Malays, for the parents to choose husbands for their daughters. Che'zin's daughter didn't even know the man that was to be her husband. Her father had shown her his photo and had told her, it seems, that she ought to be proud to become the wife of Rahim, who was a clerk in the Government service.

"When I left her that night she clung to me, as it was the last time in all probability; but in my heart, I was already determined that she would be mine and mine only, by hook or crook. Only, I told her nothing, gave her no hopes, for I had not made my plans then. As I lay awake that night, thinking of and planning impossible things, I remembered a man whom I met in the town where I worked. He was a 'pawang' and was reported to have done wonder-

ful things both evil and good. I suddenly made up my mind to consult him. The marriage was to take place three days later and there was time enough to mature a plan and prevent it from taking place.

"I started early next morning and arriving there, I got a friend of mine to take me to this 'pawang.' Without any preamble, I told him my story. He listened to me patiently and at the end turned to me with a smile and said :

" 'Of course, you now want my help to marry the girl yourself' ?"

"I nodded.

" 'And what about the other fellow?' he asked in a nonchalant way.

" 'I don't care what you do to him,' I said rashly.

" 'All right, it shall be as you wish, but what will you pay me for this?' he asked me with amazing bluntness.

"I had brought with me all my savings — \$50, not knowing what the 'pawang' would expect from me. However, I was in no mind to bargain with him, and in my impatience and excitement, I took out four ten-dollar notes and threw them on the mat on which he was sitting. The old man clawed at the notes eagerly and put them in the folds of his 'sarong'."

Dollah stopped his narrative to roll another of his cigarettes. Somewhere at the back of his house, one of his children was crying as lustily as it could, accompanied by the caterwaulings of the other four, while his wife was pounding rice in the foreyard of

the cottage. It was an irritating noise, and Dollah started shouting at his wife :

"If you can't keep a child quiet, of what use are you to me—you might as well go away." The recitation of the story seemed to have made his nerves jerky.

"Tuan," said Dollah, resuming his story, "it is getting late and I will cut my story short. Late that night I returned home with the 'pawang'. Next morning I showed him the house of Che'zin and asked him what part I had to play in this adventure. He asked me for a photo of the bridegroom and this I got from Che'zin's daughter on some pretext. He looked at the photo intently and said mysteriously : 'Poor fellow !' Besides this, he would neither discuss nor divulge any of his plans. The rest of the day he closeted himself in his room in the coffee-shop with the photo.

"Next day was the date fixed for the marriage. Che'zin's house was full of people and there was feasting and merry-making. It seemed that the bridegroom and his party had already arrived. The people in my house had all gone, but I lingered behind, not knowing what to do. The absence of the 'pawang' made me nervous and frightened. What would happen if he didn't turn up?

"At last, I went to Che'zin's house, unable to restrain myself any longer. The marriage was to take place a few hours hence and so everything and everybody were ready. The ladies were all in the hall and there was the bride, beautiful but sad, among her friends ; and in the spacious sitting-room, I saw the bridegroom for the first time.

"He was a handsome young man perfectly dressed in full Malay costume, with a small 'kris' at his side, stuck in the folds of his sarong. He was talking with all the notables of the village, including the 'Pengu' and the Police Inspector, Mustapha.

"It was such a long time ago that I cannot remember my feelings when I first saw my rival, but this I remember—I felt extremely sorry for him without any reason. A few minutes later a man dressed well but not gorgeously, joined the group. Something in his voice struck me and, coming closer, I saw that it was none other than the 'pawang'.

"How he had been able to come there as a guest and be acquainted with most people of the group, was a mystery to me. He seemed not to know of my existence and this complete sang-froid made me uneasy. As the time of the marriage ceremony drew nearer, I grew feverish with impatience. I thought I would approach him and ask him if his intentions were to rob me of my \$40. Before I could make up my mind, the thing happened!"

Dollah stopped for a while, burying his head in his hands, overcome by the recollection of what happened years ago. I coughed impatiently and he resumed.

"Tuan, the thing happened quicker than I can tell you. I was watching every movement of the pawang. He took out a silver cigarette case from the pocket of his baju and offering the bridegroom a cigarette, took one himself. Rahim took a holder from his pocket and lit the cigarette. He puffed complacently, resting his arm on the window-sill.

"The 'pawang' had, by now, walked away to the farther end of the room and was seemingly admiring some Java brass plates on a shelf. Che'zin was talking with the father of Rahim, the bridegroom.

"Suddenly, Rahim's cigarette-holder fell to the ground with a clatter. He clenched his hands and stared with blood-shot eyes, as if he had seen a ghost! The group of people round him instinctively fell back, completely shocked at the sudden change of his appearance. The veins on his forehead stood out and he clutched at his throat as if choking. He looked like a maniac!

"We all felt that something terrible had happened to him, but before anyone could hold him, he had taken out his 'kris' and running towards the middle of the hall, plunged the 'kris' right into the back of Che'zin!

"Che'zin fell back with a terrible cry—dead! The people in the hall, so long stupefied, now galvanised into action. They ran and closed round him, but Rahim was already strangling his own father. Five people, including myself, threw ourselves on him, but he pushed us off with the strength of ten and held his father in a vice-like grip.

"Tuan, the boy had run amok! This knowledge seemed to come to all of us instinctively and simultaneously. I have seen people running amok thus before—they are like fiends let loose from hell! An amok, in his frenzy, goes on murdering people till he is himself killed or disabled.

"Suddenly a pistol-shot rang out. Rahim fell on the ground with a gaping wound in his forehead.

The Police Inspector had shot him dead! It was the only way. Poor Che'zin! Poor Rahim! Allah knows, I am responsible for this double tragedy. I earned afterwards that the 'pawang' had put into the cigarette some infernal drug which he had procured from the Sakais."

The old man lay back on his chair completely exhausted by the narration of this strange tale. His face was serene, but I knew he was suffering from the pangs of remorse. For a few minutes he thus lay still and I kept my eyes away from him, though I was anxious to hear the end of the tale, I didn't venture to disturb him.

"Sorry, Tuan," he said apologetically, sitting up, "I haven't completed my story. You surely want to know what happened to the girl? Che'zin's wife was fond of me and secretly she had always wanted me to marry her daughter. She had never dared to express this to her husband, who wanted someone of status for his son-in-law. However, Che'zin being dead, I married her six months later."

"Married her?" I asked, completely taken by surprise.

"Of course," he said, in a matter-of-fact tone.

"Then--where is she now?" I asked, somewhat haltingly.

"Why, Tuan, what a funny thing to ask," he said with a pathetic hollow laugh, "when you have known Mina, my wife, for the last fifteen years!"

THE MING VASE

LORD PETER RANDOLF HENRY ISMAY, fifty nine, big game hunter, archaeologist and noted collector of antique, dropped at Singapore for a few days en route Bali, the land of fascinating belles. Let it be said here and at once that Lord Ismay was out Bas on a purely pleasure trip and when the Singapore "Mercury" reported, inter alia, that "possibly the scent of a rare Chinese antique accounted for his presence here," Lord Ismay was more than annoyed.

It was the second day of his stay at Singapore when Lord Ismay found himself in circumstances which were to lead him to an unforgettable experience—an "adventure", perhaps, is a more correct word, as seen in the light of future events.

He was seated on the roof garden of the Adelphi Hotel with the evening sun skimming the top of his bald pate, sipping an iced "Tiger" beer and watching lazily the colourful street scene down below representing a curious and somewhat startling melting pot of East and West, black and white, brown and yellow. Suddenly he burst out laughing uproariously. A Malay urchin riding a bicycle much too high for him had unceremoniously knocked into a bare-bodied Chinese Macaroni hawkler balancing his two cane baskets perilously at the ends of a bamboo pole bridged on his shoulder. The Chinaman with his foodstuff, cups and chopsticks fell pell-mell all over the street. Grabbing the pole and gesticulating and cursing wildly, the "Mee" man ran

for the boy who picked himself up and fled into a side lane, clutching his slipping sarong. A couple of pariah dogs made themselves free with the delicious soup that was spilt on the street while a jeering and laughing crowd quickly gathered. With the arrival of a stalwart and turbaned Sikh policeman, the... "How very funny!" drawled someone at Lord Ismay's elbow. He spun round and found a tall dark man with gleaming teeth, dressed immaculately in a suit of grey palm beach and a Turkish cap.

"Er--what?" asked Lord Ismay screwing his monocle.

"I said 'How very funny', sir," answered the young man with a slight bow.

"Yes, dashed funny, what?" exclaimed Lord Ismay looking down at the street and bursting out laughing again.

"Lord Ismay, I presume?"

"Er--what?" asked Lord Ismay, looking intently at the man with a shade of annoyance.

"Lord Ismay?" repeated the newcomer, unperturbed.

"Well--er--well, yes. I am Lord Ismay. How did you know?"

"Well, sir, well--" he answered spreading his palms with an Oriental gesture. "I am Mustapha Taufik Ali, at your service, my lord," he added with an elaborate bow.

"Oh, I see. Er--how do you do," said Lord Ismay somewhat awkwardly and extending his hand. This was the first time that someone had forced a

self-introduction upon him and broken down the cherished barrier of British reserve. However, Pas is East, thought Lord Ismay to himself, and said "Do sit down."

"Deeply honoured, my Lord," said Taufik Ali drawing up a cane chair and seating himself.

"I hope you will forgive this intrusion, sir, but hearing that you, the great collector of antique, are here, I couldn't resist the temptation of ~~er~~ making your acquaintance," said Taufik Ali apologetically. Lord Ismay noticed with inward admiration that Mustapha Taufik Ali, whoever he might be, possessed a cultured voice, carried himself well and spoke English with a B. B. C. accent. "That's all right, Mr. Ali," said Lord Ismay feeling more genially disposed towards his fellowmen after a long pull at his iced beer. "You see, sir, I am a ~~er~~ a collector of sorts myself and so..." "You a collector?" asked Lord Ismay sitting up, with a new note in his voice.

"Yes sir, a collector of antique, if I may call myself so."

"This is interesting," said Lord Ismay, looking Taufik Ali all over. The curiosity of an inborn collector was aroused. "And what is your speciality, may I know?"

"I am afraid mine is rather a peculiar one and not so classy as yours, my lord. I collect Java plates and tapestry and also Sakai kris, spears, blowpipes and implements of war."

"Sakai?" asked Lord Ismay, raising an eyebrow.

"Sakai is a Malayan aboriginal tribe, my lord," answered Taufik Ali quietly.

"I see! How very extraordinary! How very interesting!"

"Do you really think so, Lord Ismay?" asked Taulik Ali, leaning forward.

"Why, of course, I am interested in all sorts of antique. Of course, my speciality is Chinese vases."

"Ming?"

"Well--er-- yes," said Lord Ismay, rather in a guarded tone.

"I don't know of anybody out here who possesses or collects Mings," said Ali almost sotto voce.

"No, I don't expect so," replied Lord Ismay.

"Except perhaps Towkay Leong Cheong Fatt," he added as if suddenly remembering this fact.

"A Chinese?"

"A veritable Chink, my lord," said Taulik Ali contemptuously.

"And in this particular instance," he added, caressing his moustache, "it is a case of 'casting pearls before swine!'"

"Er--what? I mean, why?" asked Lord Ismay, polishing his monocle vigorously with his silk handkerchief.

"It is like this, my lord," started Ali in a confidential tone drawing his chair nearer and lighting a cigarette. "Towkay Cheong Fatt is the possessor of a rare vase--said to be a Ming and one of a pair. I happened to know the Towkay somewhat and from what I gathered from him, this vase has been in his family for centuries, so to say. When the Towkay's grandfather migrated to this country about a hundred years ago he brought it with him in a

sailing junk along with his other meagre belongings not because it was valuable—he didn't dream of that—but because it was a sort of heirloom. To the old boy it was mere junk but sentimental—well, you know, my lord, how it is with us Orientals. Ultimately it came to the hands of our friend Towkay Cheong Fatt and he being somewhat modernised retrieved it from the wine cellar, cleaned it up and set it up in his drawing room as a piece of decoration. Now, one day Towkay Cheong Fatt, who is a merchant prince, invited certain business friends for chow. Among them was a European, my lord, who nearly threw a fit when he saw this vase. He recognised it as a Ming—an original and a rare specimen of that—and informed the Towkay of the glad tidings. The Towkay at first couldn't understand the value of such a rare thing—"rare" was a term unknown to him except in connection with precious stones. But when this European explained the "rarity" of it in terms of money, there was an electrical change in Towkay Cheong Fatt. He seized it immediately and unceremoniously carried it away to his safe. From that day, my lord, he has been guarding this treasure like a dragon of old, hissing fire and venom.

"Good heavens! How very extraordinary!" exclaimed Lord Ismay fingering his monocle. A Chinese "boy" in white hovered around. Lord Ismay beckoned to him and ordered a gin pahit. "And what is yours?" he asked addressing Ali.

"I will have a lemon squash."

"What! nothing strong?" asked Lord Ismay somewhat surprised.

"Thank you, my lord, but liquor, I don't touch. It is against the ethics of the Holy Koran. Wine and the flesh of the swine—taboo!" he ended with a melodramatic gesture.

"Excuse my asking you, but are you a Mohammedan—a Malay?"

"A Mohammedan, yes, but not quite a Malay—well, you see, my lord, my father was an Indian, a Pathan but my mother was a Malay. So you see, my lord, I...well, the likes of us have grown to regard ourselves as Malay Jawi Pekans."

"Talking of this vase, do you think I could—er—have a glimpse of it?" asked Lord Ismay unable to conceal his eagerness.

"Perhaps it might be arranged, I think. In fact, my lord, I will try my best. Only—you see—"

"What! don't you know him well enough?"

"I can't say I do but that is immaterial; surely the Towkay will feel it a great honour to meet a man of your repute. But the snag is that he is away at the moment."

"Away?" queried Lord Ismay with dismay.

"Away on a trip to Java. He will be back in a week or so."

"Oh", said Lord Ismay with obvious relief. "I dare say I could prolong my stay here till then. Besides, Singapore is a delightful place."

"In that case, my lord, I shall only be too happy to take you round to Towkay Cheong one afternoon. In the meantime, would you care to have a look at my small collection?"

"Why, of course, I will be only too glad to come,"

said Lord Ismay, beaming with delight, like a school boy who had been promised an outing to the Zoo.

"Here is my address," said Ali, presenting his card and the brother collectors of antique parted old friends.

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Lord Ismay was excited and the cause of his excitement was the news of the Ming vase. As far as he knew, all the rare Mings--there were a precious few--were in the hands of the Continental and American connoisseurs. Even China, the land of their birth, could boast of only three at the present moment and Lord Ismay knew the names of the owners. And now this mysterious one in Singapore! He realised, of course, that after all this may not be a genuine period-Ming or it may be of a much later dynasty; perhaps the "European" who told the Towkay of its value, wasn't an expert after all and... However, Lord Ismay had a hunch that he was on the eve of a great discovery. He had a similar feeling when he was excavating in Iran.

II

The next day he paid a visit to the lovely red-tiled bungalow of Taufik Ali in Pasir Panjang. The Eastern gentleman received him with the air of a nabob and entertained him to a lavish tea before

taking him round. Lord Ismay was enchanted with his host's collection—he had never seen the like of them before; and though most of the curios were only a couple of hundred years old (except, of course, some of the Java tapestries), they had their value in the antique world. He fell in love with a rare Malay kris sheathed in a sandalwood case; the handle of the kris was cunningly designed in ivory and Chinese gold.

"I have never seen such beautiful workmanship in my life. And you say it is Malay?"

"Yes, my lord. It was a gift to my great-grand-father from a Malay Sultan over two centuries ago for a small deed of kindness."

"I see," muttered Lord Ismay inspecting it more closely. "I am sure it must be very valuable—to you."

"Yes, of course, yes," replied Ali nodding profusely. "Besides, the sentimental value of a thing like this."

"Yes, of course, I realise," said Lord Ismay with a sympathetic nod.

Taufik Ali took it from the wall and looked at it lovingly, caressingly. Then, with a dramatic sweep of his hands, he handed it over to his visitor with a bow:

"Accept it as a little token of our meeting. May it ripen into friendship, if I may aspire so high," he added grandiloquently.

Lord Ismay was flabbergasted! He had heard of Oriental magnanimity and eccentricities but this was the limit.

"It is very kind of you, Mr. Ali, but I am sure I couldn't accept such a valuable gift- not even from a close friend. Besides, it will fetch you a tidy sum at any sale," replied Lord Ismay quietly.

"My friend, is money everything? Sentiment- yes. But if you do not accept a little thing like this from one whose poor dwelling you have honoured with your presence, you will be wounding my feelings, my sentiments, badly."

The earnestness and the pathos in his voice completely disarmed Lord Ismay. He knew that Taufik Ali's high sounding and perhaps empty phrases were not meant to convey humility or servility or even flattery. It was inborn in the high class Moslem of Hindustan to speak in this fashion. As for the sincerity of his motive- well, Lord Ismay felt that the man offered the gift from the bottom of his heart. It was embarrassing but there was no way out of it. He accepted it with good grace and genuine joy and thanked Ali profusely. Lord Ismay chuckled with delight as he visualised the face of his London friend and rival, Sir Charles Garnet, when shown this invaluable ornament.

Taufik Ali looked extremely happy when Lord Ismay accepted the kris. He rubbed his hands and nodded frequently. His eyes seemed to say: "The great Ingles has accepted my humble gift. I am honoured. May Allah increase his tribe!"

* * *

There was no news of Taufik Ali for three days. Then one afternoon he burst into Lord Ismay's room,

sweating profusely and looking very flustered. "Please excuse my uncereemonious entry, my lord, but I have news for you," said Ali fanning himself with a folded newspaper.

"For me?"

"Yes. Towkay Cheong Patt is back from Java. He arrived this morning."

"Ah! That's indeed good news. Do you think—er—I could visit. . . ." "It is all fixed up. The Towkay has kindly consented to see us to-morrow afternoon at five. Will it be O. K. with you?"

"That suits me fine; I can take Saturday's boat to Bali. But really it is awfully kind of you to take so much trouble for. . . ."

"Not at all, not at all, my lord," said Ali pressing his finger tips together. Lord Ismay ordered for some soft drinks and offered his visitor a cigar. Both men puffed complacently for a few minutes, Ali lost in a brown study.

"By the way, Mr. Ali, did you ever see that vase of Towkay Cheong Patt?"

"Why, yes! I had a glimpse once. To me it didn't seem particularly beautiful or striking. Of course, this 'Ming' business is all Greek to me."

"Do you remember it well enough to describe it to me?" asked Lord Ismay.

"I have rather a hazy recollection. Let me see—it is about nine inches high and. . . ."

"Rather an unusual height," observed Lord Ismay.

"—and is blue with. . . ."

"Blue?" asked Lord Ismay, sitting up.

"Yes, rather a dull blue," replied Ali in a flat tone. Little did he suspect the effect his words had on Lord Ismay.

"But—but—this is amazing! There are only two blue Ming vases in existence—one with Rudolf Shackel, the New York multi-millionaire and the other somewhere in China—Canton, to be exact."

"Are you sure, my lord?" asked Ali standing up, a strange light in his eyes.

"Of course, of course!" replied Lord Ismay rather impatiently.

"I will describe it to you further. The design, the motif, symbolic of the Chinese conception of an eclipse—a dragon swallowing the sun."

"What!" cried Lord Ismay aloud and sprang up.

"Why, what's the matter, my lord?" asked Ali completely taken by surprise.

"The motif—describe it again," said Lord Ismay hoarsely.

Ali did so. Lord Ismay flung his hands wide and burst out "Impossible! Impossible!"

Taufik Ali was completely bewildered by the strange behaviour of Lord Ismay. He remained standing and watched Lord Ismay pacing up and down the room with his hands clasped behind.

"What is the matter, my lord?" Ali ventured to ask after a few minutes.

"Matter? My dear fellow, if what you say is true, why—it is THE vase I have been searching for a quarter of a century!"

A remarkable change took place in Ali. The

colour was drained out of his face and he broke into a cold perspiration. He sank into a chair and looked at Lord Ismay as if he had seen an apparition. The latter, however, was too engrossed in his own thoughts to notice Ali's behaviour. When Lord Ismay addressed him a few minutes later, he had regained his composure.

"Mr. Ali, a great and kind Providence has thrown us together. I shall never forget this service of yours. Believe me, you shall not go unrewarded," said Lord Ismay and impulsively shook Ali by his hand.

"Service?" inquired Ali rather intrigued.

"I mean your leading me to this find—your helping me to realise my life's ambition!"

"Does it mean that your lordship intends to—er—secure this vase?" asked Ali calmly.

"Of course, I want to buy it. I must have it—at any price!"

"A thousand pities, my lord, a thousand pities!" exclaimed Taufik Ali with an audible sigh.

"Where is the snag?" asked Lord Ismay with a note of impatience.

"He won't sell, Lord Ismay," replied Ali quietly.

"Won't sell? But dash it all, I will pay him handsomely—anything he wants."

"I am afraid that swine of a Chinaman will not part with it for love or money."

"But—but—" said Lord Ismay with dismay, "why not? He isn't a great connoisseur or lover of these antiques. You told me so, didn't you?"

"Yes, I did. I believe it is that possessive instinct in mankind and well....."

"Well, I will be blown!" exclaimed Lord Ismay biting his cigar viciously. For a few minutes both remained silent. Ali gazed at the distant expanse of blue sea shimmering in the light of a fading tropical sun and seemed lost in thought. Lord Ismay tapped the parquet floor impatiently with his feet and snorted.

"Unless—unless—" said Ali slowly looking at his host out of the corner of his eyes.

"Unless what?" asked Lord Ismay leaning forward.

"No—no—it is useless!" remarked Ali in a hopeless voice.

"But, confound it all, Ali, what is it?" asked Lord Ismay very peeved.

Taufik Ali made no reply; he looked at Lord Ismay with a curious intensity that was, to say the least, rude and oppressive. And when Lord Ismay, intrigued and chagrined, opened his mouth to swear profanely, Ali held up his hand with a dramatic touch.

"Lord Ismay, forgive me if I have offended you. You know the Chinese have a curious saying 'Slowly catchee monkey'. Mark you, my lord, there is deep philosophy behind those funny words. In a case like this one has to hasten slowly. The problem now is this—you are determined to buy that vase; the owner will not sell it—an irresistible force meets an immovable object! Clearly, the cunning of man has to come to the rescue," said Ali with a gravity well becoming a professor of Metaphysics.

Lord Ismay burst out laughing and forgot all

his rancour. Ali looked abashed but grinned sheepishly.

"My Lord Ismay, I have a plan—conceived on the spur of the moment—but it is an inspiration," confided Ali somberly.

"Let's hear it," replied Lord Ismay rather jocularly, with the air of Sir Toby Belch.

"My Lord Ismay, the poet said, 'everything is fair in love and war'. I say it applies also to this antique business. A collector of your standing and ambitions must secure a rare bit like this vase at any cost, by any means, short of murder. Especially, in a case like this, it is a sin to let an uncouth Chink hide that magnificent vase from an appreciating and eager world. It goes against our aesthetic—er..."

"Yes, yes, quite. Yes, in a way you are right, my dear friend, but one has to consider..."

"Consider nothing!" interrupted Ali, with vehemence. "My plan is..." He drew near and whispered to Lord Ismay for a few minutes. A look of surprise flashed across Lord Ismay's countenance; it soon turned to astonishment, incredulity. For a second he stiffened and flinched but otherwise he didn't betray his inward feelings.

"By Gad! A most villainous plot. It can't be done, you know."

"Why not? a mere subterfuge—nothing very unscrupulous, I am sure," remarked Ali complacently.

"I will be damned if I do such an infamous thing!" exclaimed Lord Ismay, turning red in the face.

"I didn't expect you would. Don't blame me

my lord—I only suggested this—er—unusual way to help you. However, let's forget it. But, of course, this doesn't mean you will deny yourself the treat of seeing that vase?"

"Of course not. Thanks for reminding me," said Lord Ismay instantly regaining his composure and his old self again. "To-morrow afternoon at five?"

"To-morrow afternoon at five. Bye-bye," said Ali and left the place.

III

Lord Ismay was penitent after Ali left. He felt that he had hurt the man's feelings by ticking him off rather sharply. After all, he thought to himself, Ali had only meant to help him and didn't intend to insult or degrade him. He lighted another cigar and started pacing about the room. He reviewed mentally all that Ali had said about his "plan" and the more he analysed it and thought over it the more his determination sagged. He decided that the plan was not as black as he had pictured it to be. Besides it was ingenious and fairly safe.

"After all," Lord Ismay said to himself, "I am not going to rob the Chinaman wholesale. Besides, he does not deserve to keep the jewel of a vase. Yes, everything is fair in love and war and

by Gums! in this antique collection business, certainly yes. I am sure it needs reconsideration!"

Lord Ismay took a cold shower bath and then sat out in the lawn with a whisky-and-soda. He felt refreshed and at peace with the whole world. Lazily he watched the Malayan swallows taking their perch for the night, penguin-like, on the electric wires over the road. He had never seen anything so funny in all his travels. In ten minutes' time the whole length of the wire was occupied densely by this army of birds that flocked from all over the island of Singapore. Curious, he reflected, they didn't fight for place or priority and....It was in this mood that his thoughts suddenly switched over to the matter that had been discussed earlier in the afternoon. And as he thought over it, he suddenly made up his mind. He gulped down his drink and sauntered off towards the foyer of the hotel. He walked into a telephone booth and rang up Ali.

"That Ali? Lord Ismay here."

"Yes, Lord Ismay?" floated the eager voice of Ali over the wires.

"I say, Ali, I have made up my mind."

"What about?"

"About that d-d plan of yours. I have decided to take your advice, come what may," replied Lord Ismay with a chuckle.

"What?" shouted Ali incredulously, "you aren't pulling my legs, are you?"

"Of course not. I am in dead earnest."

For a moment Ali held the phone and said nothing. Had Lord Ismay the aid of television he

would have seen a curious smile, half malicious, half triumphant, spreading over the features of Ali. He coughed and spoke again. "Well, in that case every thing is o. k. Only—only—I think we had better postpone our visit to....."

"Postpone? Is that necessary?" asked Lord Ismay quickly.

"Yes, postpone until the day after—Thursday morning ten o'clock."

"That will do nicely. My boat sails on Saturday."

Ali put down the phone and heaved a sigh of relief.

IV

Lord Ismay was impatient. He didn't like this delay. That elusive vase was so near and yet so far away. It was tantalizing. He wanted to get it, hold it in his hands and caress it. "Hope Ali doesn't bungle the whole thing or prove yellow at the last moment," reflected Lord Ismay uneasily. His fears were groundless. Ali had no intention of quitting the proposition and was at that moment working hard to make this job a success.

At half past nine on Thursday morning Mustapha Taufik Ali arrived at the hotel dressed immaculately in a suit of Chinese silk and humming "A Lady in Blue." Lord Ismay was ready and after gulping down a couple of whisky stengahs got up and followed

Ali to his car "borrowed specially for the occasion." Both remained silent after exchanging a few banalities. Ali seemed thoroughly occupied with the steering wheel while his passenger nervously twirled his moustache. Soon they were out of town and was speeding along a suburb of Singapore which Lord Ismay had not been to.

"A couple of miles more," volunteered Ali. "The Chinaman is no fool," warned Ali with a side-long glance at his friend.

"Yes--er--yes," muttered Lord Ismay looking like a guilty school boy about to pull off a practical joke on his form master. A few minutes later Ali changed down and turned into a lane.

"That's the old boy's place," said Ali pointing to a huge and somewhat dilapidated grey mansion which then looked to Lord Ismay like a towering sinister beast. Ali brought the car to a standstill under the portico. There was no one in sight when they got down and Ali walked up to the sliding grilled door so common in old-fashioned Chinese houses and shouted something in Malay. Lord Ismay noticed that the extensive grounds round the house were ill-kept and full of weeds and *lalangs*. Some dried up tropical orchids and cannas straggled here and there and in an abandoned tennis court were piled up heaps of coconuts. The outer door was soon opened by an obsequious and grinning servant. Ali led Lord Ismay into the hall. It was a magnificent room but dark and ill ventilated. It was overcrowded with furniture and things to a degree of suffocation. Lord Ismay noticed a valuable

drawing room set of Chinese ebony-mother-of-pearl side by side with a modern Rexine couch. On the walls hung innumerable pictures: family portraits, photos of film stars, cheap prints of Continental artists and, in contrast, there were beautiful Chinese and Japanese pictures and etchings on glass, canvas, bamboo and silk. All round the room were shelves containing Indian and Javanese brass work and some Malay pewter. In a corner stood a magnificent Chinese screen worked in jade and lacquer shielding a sort of an altar over which hung a huge picture of the God "Kongfu". In another corner was a brass table with copper bowls from which drifted the exotic smell of some Eastern incense. The content of the room left him somewhat bewildered and shocked his aesthetic feelings. It was quite ten minutes before the owner of the house made his appearance. Towkay Leong Cheong Fatt was a short draper man dressed in a pair of loose Chinese trousers and jacket of blue silk and a Mandarin cap. He grinned and bowed profusely and when Ali introduced Lord Ismay, he shook the Englishman's hand vigorously and burst into pidgin English. "Velly glad; velly glad see you. Me velly sorry come latee. Pleece sit down. Sit down, pleeece sit down."

Lord Ismay and Ali made themselves comfortable and their host offered them cigars and green tea in little porcelain cups. Ali and the Towkay carried on a conversation half in English, half in Malay, the subject of the discussion being "the great white chief" and his knowledge and love of antiques. Lord

Ismay felt impatient and ill at ease. Suddenly the Towkay turned to Lord Ismay and said, "You likee see my cup?"

"Your---what?" asked Lord Ismay in surprise.

"He means the vase," whispered Ali.

"Why, yes, yes, of course if you would be so kind," answered Lord Ismay tingling with excitement.

Towkay Cheong Fatt walked to a sandalwood chest at the farther end of the room and fetched a cardboard box. He lifted the lid of the box with the air of a master magician, and handed the vase to Lord Ismay who fixed his monocle and grabbed it with both hands. He turned it round and peered closely at it and as he did so, a change came over him. Towkay Cheong Fatt failed to notice this but was obviously pleased with the scrutiny his "cup" was receiving from the eyes of the "Honourable White Devil."

"My cup---it cost plentee plentee monee---velly velly nicee" purred the Chinaman stretching a hand at the same time to retrieve the vase. Lord Ismay paid no heed to him but walked off to a window to examine the vase in a better light. The Towkay wanted to follow him but Ali detained him with a gesture. A few minutes later Lord Ismay let out a cry of mingled surprise and joy. "Ali! Ali! It is the goods! It is valu..."

"Hist! For Heaven's sake, shut up!" hissed Ali, coming near Lord Ismay quickly. The Chinaman ran towards them, bewildered and gesticulating.

"What matter? What matter? You no likee

mee vasee? My cup—cost plentee, plentee monee! he almost shrieked.

Lord Ismay opened his mouth to say something but Ali coughed loudly and winked. Lord Ismay gasped and stuttered but Ali coughed louder and muttered "Steady, Sir!" under his breath.

Lord Ismay set down the vase, took off his monocle and burst out into peals of laughter; Ali followed suit. The Chinaman looked helpless from Ali to Lord Ismay and from Lord Ismay to Ali and then he flushed deeply and broke out angrily.

"Why you laugh? Why you laugh? You makee mee fool? You go away!" he screamed.

Ali patted Towkay Cheong Fatt on his back and cooled him down somewhat. "Towkay, forgive me for laughing like this but you see your vase is not genuine—it is only an imitation; an excellent one, I must say," exclaimed Lord Ismay.

The Chinaman didn't understand fully Lord Ismay's chaste English and looked at Ali for elucidation. Ali explained to him in Malay. The effect was devastating. He collapsed on a chair and broke out into a heavy sweat.

"Then my vasee not cost plentee monee—my cup no good! Ah! bitterness, bitterness!" he moaned piteously and knocked his head on the table.

"I will blake it; I will blake it," he exclaimed, seizing the vase.

Ali sprang forward and wrenched it out of his grip before any mischief was done.

"Ali, tell the Towkay that I am sorry for him; tell also that if the vase were a genuine one it would

have fetched him anything between \$25,000 to \$30,000. But even as a first class imitation, as this happens to be, it has its value." Ali explained Lord Ismay's words in Malay.

The Chinaman said, "Me don't want humbugging vasee—you take him away," he cried looking at the vase with a shuddering glance. Lord Ismay drew Ali aside and discussed something in whispers. Ali went over to the Towkay, now on the verge of tears, and said, "Lord Ismay is a very kind man and offers you two thousand dollars for it."

"But if vasee no good why give me monnee?" asked the Chinaman suddenly growing suspicious.

"Because imitation no use to you but some use to him, savvy? He present vase to one American friend who not know real or false, see?" explained Ali in broken English for the Towkay's benefit. Towkay Cheong Fatt thought deeply for a few minutes.

"All light, all light—you take away vasee; me rich man—plentee monnee—no want falsee thing!"

"My Lord, better strike when the iron is hot," exclaimed Ali quickly and heedlessly, knowing fully well the limitations of the Chinaman's knowledge of English. Lord Ismay took out a couple of \$1,000 notes and handed over to Ali who in turn gave them to the Towkay.

"All light, all light. Thank you, me very sad—vasee no good," the Chinaman said with a sigh, grasping the notes.

"I believe a quick exit is advisable," said Ali taking his walking stick. Lord Ismay grasped the

vase and walked out followed by the howling Chinaman.

As the car sped along, both men remained silent. Nearing the hotel Lord Ismay suddenly cried out exultantly, "We have done it, Ali; we have done it!"

"Yes, thank Allah! But you acted splendidly," replied Ali enthusiastically.

"By Gums! yes," answered Lord Ismay remembering his College Dramatic Union days.

"Ali—er—Ali—I want to say something. Hope you don't take it in the wrong light and..."

"Shoot ahead," answered Ali looking at Lord Ismay expectantly.

"I will feel a cad—er—unhappy— if I let you go unrewarded; after all, I am the gainer."

Ali remained silent for a little while and answered, "Well, if you feel like that, my Lord, why— I shan't object. Besides, between ourselves, my Lord, I am not particularly flushed with money. A struggling lawyer, you know, just keeping up the show."

"That's right. It is jolly good of you to accept a little help from me for all that you have done in this case," spoke Lord Ismay, simultaneously slipping a \$1,000 note into Ali's pocket.

They parted at the hotel gate. That was the last Lord Ismay saw of Ali.

V

On Friday morning Lord Ismay was setting out to see the shipping Agents when a Police Officer presented himself and demanded an interview. Lord Ismay didn't like policemen and tried to evade but Major Cruishank of the S. S. Police was insistent.

"I came to see you, sir, on a matter of the utmost importance," said the officer in a firm but courteous tone.

"I don't see how the Police can be interested in me. I am only a visitor and I dare say I haven't transgressed in the eyes of the law," replied Lord Ismay testily.

"If you will give me five minutes I may be able to explain matters," answered the officer with a note of authority. Lord Ismay showed him in.

"It has been brought to my notice that you have been—er—rather on friendly terms with an undesirable and shady character—one Peroze Khan—an Indian and I..."

"You are misinformed, I am afraid. I know of no Indian or shady character here," replied his Lordship coldly.

"But, surely, Lord Ismay, you were seen together with a tall dark well-dressed man?"

"But that was Mr. Mustapha Taufik Ali, a Malay lawyer and a perfect gentleman. I certainly object..."

"Ah! the same," cut in the officer sharply. "That is one of his many aliases. And lawyer, my foot; a confidence trickster and an oily crook on

whom I have been trying to lay my hands for a couple of years."

"But—but—you must be making a mistake. This fellow studied at Oxford and speaks English like a pukka sahib—surely..."

"I allow you all that," said the officer quietly, "but that does not debar him from being a crook. As a matter of fact his education, accent and his well-bred swagger have helped him to become one of the most successful and elusive crooks who victimise the European tourist class. Believe me, Sir, I have made no mistake. Only I hope I am not too late."

"Well, I must say that for once your gentleman crook has given himself a holiday and attached himself to me purely for an artistic pursuit," said Lord Ismay with a smile and proceeded to tell him everything that happened during the last few days. Incidentally, he showed the officer the kris which Ali had presented to him. Major Cruishank grudgingly admitted that it was rather a valuable and rare specimen.

"But you have been robbed, all the same," said the officer with conviction.

"But he had no chance!"

"What about the vase?"

"What! the vase? Why, it is one of the rarest in existence—the connoisseur's dream; and I got it for a song, thanks to Ali," exclaimed Lord Ismay with unconcealed joy.

"I am afraid you must have been played out—it must be a 'frost'," replied the officer drily.

Lord Ismay turned stiff and his face reddened. "Look here, Mr. Policeman," he burst out angrily, "are you trying to teach me about Ming vases? For your information, which should have been collected before you came to see me, I may add that I have one of the best collections of Mings and in England I have an unimpeachable reputation as a connoisseur and you—you..."

"Forgive me, Lord Ismay, but I am only doing my duty and I feel it in my bones that there is something fishy. I bet you my bottom dollar you have been fleeced," he replied unabashed. For answer, Lord Ismay brought out the vase and placed it on the table.

"It is no use showing me this—I know as much of vases as—well, as you do of rearing babies. But I can tell you..."

"Yes, tell me one thing. If Ali is the crook you say why didn't he fleece me of twenty thousand dollars instead of a niggardly two thousand? I might as well tell you that I was willing to pay anything for that vase."

"That is easy. It is a psychological approach. Now, first of all, it stands to reason that if you were to pay \$20,000 for a Ming instead of a tenth of that sum, you would naturally be more cautious, more exacting in your scrutiny and not so quick in your decision. Perhaps you might have taken some time to think over it or even consult someone else. Secondly in the event of your discovering the deception (as undoubtedly you will, sooner or later) a connoisseur of your repute may not care to expose your

folly by going to the police for a paltry sum; but had it been, say, twenty-five thousand dollars, who knows? Thirdly, in cases like this there is nothing so safe as ready money. A tourist in all probability has a few thousand dollars with him in cash, traveller's cheque and the like, but for a large sum he may have to wire his bank and that means delay. 'A bird in the hand' policy. And then, he relieves you of another thousand dollars. All told, three thousand dollars of good money gone west," finished Major Cruishank with a grin.

"That is all very well but what about Towkay Cheong Patt?"

"Oh, the Chinaman! Why, a confederate, of course!"

"I will tell you that that man couldn't be acting; he was genuine, I tell you."

"And so was your 'Mustapha Taufik Ali'!" laughed the officer.

All this time Lord Ismay was turning over the vase in his hands and looking at it carefully. Suddenly he laid it down and stood up with the air of a man who had made a sudden decision.

"Do you know who is the greatest authority on Ming out in the East?"

"Bless my soul, I don't," answered the officer frankly.

"Of course you wouldn't. He is Chan Yue-Sze, a Mandarin living in Shantung."

"Well, what about it?"

"I will see him—show him the vase. That ought to satisfy you?"

"And meantime let the rogue escape when after all these years I have something tangible—enough to put him behind prison bars?" exclaimed Major Cruishank with heat.

"I will take the flying boat to-day and I can wire you from China; only a matter of five or six days."

"Done!" said the officer quickly standing up. "I will risk it. I will be awaiting your message eagerly. Though, of course, it is a foregone conclusion."

With this parting shot, the officer departed.

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Major Cruishank, O. B. E., moved the machinery of the Police with a grim resolution. He determined to get Peroze Khan, alias Mustapha Taufik Ali, this time. Now or never, he knew. Ali had disappeared from Singapore but the Police had traced him to Sumatra; the D. D. I. Police were on his heels. It didn't take Major Cruishank very long to find out that the Chinese was, as he had suspected, a henchman of Ali's—a forger with half a dozen convictions. Also he had found out that the house to which Lord Ismay was taken to was hired for the purpose and so were the furniture and other paraphernalia. The vase, he traced to a second hand dealer who had sold it for ten dollars to the Chinaman. A well thought out plan and well carried out! But there was no escape this time, thought Major Cruishank with satisfaction. He had the whole case worked out in detail and it only remained now

to hear from Lord Ismay. And, as he gleefully rubbed his hands together, he thought of the long delayed promotion.

Seven days after Lord Ismay had left Singapore, Major Cruishank received the eagerly-awaited telegram.

He tore open the envelope with feverish haste and read :

"SORRY TO DISAPPOINT YOU STOP VASE GENUINE
STOP WORTH THIRTY THOUSAND DOLLARS STOP LOVE
TO ALL."

ZUBAIDEH

It was nine years ago that I first met Nogan. He had come out here without a glimmer of knowledge of this country—so much so that he thought Singapore and Penang were the only two places in Malaya inhabited by mankind. The Malays he thought were still aborigines. Imagine his bewilderment therefore when he was first posted at Nawar—a village far interior with scarcely three hundred people, mostly Malays. He had come out as an Electrician in the Degong Tin Co. Ltd. Poor Nogan! He had expected to be posted at Singapore but what he didn't know was that S'pore was only the Head Office and that they had branches all over the peninsula in every possible nook and corner, and this was one of the worst corners. To Nogan, with all these foreign faces—Chinese, Tamils, Javanese and Malays,—this place was at first an evil nightmare. He could neither speak and make himself understood nor could he understand their outlandish tongues or gestures. He could only talk in English to the three clerks in the Office and another—who was postmaster, clerk, telegraph operator and general factotum of the local Post Office.

I was at that time at Kampar as Manager of the Anglo Kling Rubber Co. This town is eight miles away from Nawar and, of course, in Malaya a distance of eight miles is of no consideration at all. Nogan would therefore come to see me whenever he liked; a car service ran almost every fifteen minutes to and fro

and that too, for a matter of a few cents. Nogan's duty was usually from 7 a.m. to 2 p.m., and so I would come to my place at about 4 p.m., almost every day. Times without number he used to stay overnight and go back in the morning.

I found Nogan's company very delightful especially as we were almost of the same age and came from the same part of Bikrampur. He was a clean-living young man of handsome appearance and charming manners. He was married just before he came out here but left his wife at home intending to bring her after a year or two when he had somewhat settled down; a wise thing really. Bengalees are few and far between in this country and it is for this reason that Bengalees out here have some regard for each other and help each other in times of distress. This spirit perhaps is not seen in other foreign parts where Bengalees have settled down in large numbers for verily, familiarity breeds contempt. It was thus that my bungalow became the rendezvous of Bengalees—old and young—who lived nearby (which, of course, means anything within 50 miles) probably because I had a commodious house, a beautiful garden, an excellent cook and, shall I say, the additional qualification of being a care-free bachelor? Nogan was always one of the company and he began to "see" Bengalee faces pretty often and so, by and by, he began to tolerate this country and perhaps even like it?

Eight months passed in this way. Nogan with his keen observation and good memory soon picked up the "lingua franca" and also a smattering of

Tamil which was necessary in the execution of his duties.

As days went by, Nogan's visit to me became more and more scarce. At first, instead of coming almost every day, he came once or twice a week, then his visits became irregular and soon scarce. I thought he had grown tired of my company which was, but natural. It was time for me to visit him instead, I decided.

It so happened that Nogan had not come for a month and so somewhat worried and piqued, I went to see him one afternoon with a good specimen of "hilsa" fish which is so scarce in this country and yet so beloved of us.

Imagine my surprise when on pushing open the door of his small bungalow, I found Nogan reclining on an easy chair and a Malay woman fanning him with a native nipah-palm fan! The presence of this strange woman surprised me but when I saw Nogan's appearance, I was shocked. He was reduced by half, pale and with yellowish eyes. He explained to me that he had a very bad attack of malaria. I felt extremely hurt that he had not informed me. Nogan probably seeing what was passing in my mind at once explained to me that he did not want to disturb me and besides, what could I do?

The Company supplied him with necessary medicine and medical attention. I could only nod and say "I see?" I was so surprised at Nogan's condition that I had not looked at the woman carefully. I now beheld a fair-looking young Malay woman—a common village type. Her close-fitting

native garments displayed her voluptuous curves and there was a sort of subdued glitter in her eye. I looked askance at Nogan and he explained somewhat nervously, biting his fingernails, that his "Boss" had told him that it was usual to get a Malay nurse, and as such, his foreman had brought the woman. Well, it certainly wasn't the usual thing to do. Probably his boss had joked with him, and Nogan—the simpleton—had acted accordingly. Probably his boss didn't know that Nogan was a grasping widower; it certainly was not usual for a bachelor to have a native woman "nurse" at his house. Nogan started to praise the woman: she was an excellent nurse—she could massage him wonderfully—she could even cook well. I listened impatiently and shrugged my shoulders for I had taken a dislike towards the woman and her presence strangely disturbed me. I suddenly asked Nogan when he could dispense with the woman. He started and said "Oh! as soon as my convalescence is over." I advised him that it would be better if he came over to my place; no nursing was required now—only rest and good food. Nogan grumbled something about difficulty in getting leave and moving about and such and other namby-pamby arguments. Obviously, the idea did not suit him and so I dropped the matter.

About a fortnight after, during which time I heard nothing of Nogan, I went again to see him. It was about two in the afternoon when I reached his place and as the door stood ajar, I entered. The hall was empty and so were the bedrooms. Some-

what surprised I wandered into the kitchen. What I saw held me spellbound—a scene I shall never forget! The same Malay woman stood there but it was what she was doing that amazed me. She was dressed in a small sarong which was tied at her breast and reached till above her knees, thus exposing the golden colour of her neck and bare limbs. Her raven-black hair was let loose and hung in a glossy curly mass reaching almost to her ankles. On a small table—used for chopping meat—was laid a large banana leaf. On this were some fruit and condiments, a lump of pork, a bowl of water, a dead fowl, the blood of which fell oozing into an earthen bowl; and, what surprised me most, was something which looked like a waxen doll—a miniature human male figure—which the woman was holding in her right hand above the evil paraphernalia spread on the table! On this, with the left hand, she was sprinkling water and blood of the fowl alternately! She was staring at the waxen doll—as I afterwards found it to be—as if in a trance, and at the same time chanting something weird in Malay which I could not understand. So intent was she on her evil rites that she did not even notice my presence. The whole picture nauseated me and suddenly the significance of this became clear to me! I stood transfixed with horror and loathing—she was doing something satanic!—she was “charming” somebody! Nogan!! The waxen image was that of Nogan and she was charming it! The realisation struck me dumb and I stood motionless as I watched this horrid yet beautiful satanic agent at work. Suddenly, as

she snatched the bowl of blood to pour over the figure, the spell was broken and with a jump at her, I shouted "Babi"! She dropped the bowl and swung round at me, instinctively snatching a kris that lay nearby. She stood utterly bewildered and looked with such menacing attitude and eyes that burned like coal, that I felt cowed! Then suddenly she threw away the kris and smiling bewitchingly, lighted a cigarette and invited me to sit down. I ground my teeth and walked off to the verandah. Nogan was just coming back with swinging gait and a cigar in his mouth. He seemed sufficiently recovered. As soon as he saw me, his cigar fell from his mouth and he blustered, smiled and turned red by turns. He didn't expect me and yet he seemed glad in a way. Jumping up the steps of the verandah, he grasped my hand.

"Dada" (so he had called me) "so glad you have turned up. Why didn't you come all these days?" "Well," I said warmly, "why didn't you?" "Well--- I---I was not feeling well and eh and I."

"How do you feel now," I said, cutting him short. "As fit as a fiddle," he said, slapping me vigorously on the back. "Then, why---that?" I asked calmly pointing at the woman who was now innocently sitting on a chair fully dressed. The expression on Nogan's face was both pitiful and ludicrous. "I asked her to go--- but she would not go---said I was weak still and all that---" "This is your house and you can kick her out," said I, my temper rising. "Ah well! if she won't go what can I do?" he said stubbornly. I kept quiet, too angry to speak. It was no use explaining

to him what I saw in the kitchen. He wouldn't understand, neither would he believe. I therefore tried to thrash out matters as calmly as I could. "Look here, man! Don't you realise what this means! what people will say? Probably you are innocent but can't you see how ugly all this looks."—"All right, dada. I will kick her off to-morrow," he said peevisly, throwing his shoes in a corner. Kick her out to-morrow! Ah! it would not be so easy now, I said to myself. But I was sick at heart. I knew the mischief had already begun to work—she had already "charmed" him. A Malay woman's charm—which meant he was bound to her—he couldn't live without her, try how he might! Often did I hear of such tales of "charming" and turn away with unbelieving ears. But now I saw and I believed. I could only hope that Nogan would rebuff her—that her charms would not work on him!

For three months I saw nothing of Nogan, though I heard a good deal. He was living openly with the woman. I did not go, for it was useless. I only hoped that time could undo this knot which this woman had tied round my friend; time might diminish the power of her hold over him. Our mutual friends had often "advised" him to send the woman away. But he would only say "what can I do—she will not go." Poor fellow! it wasn't his fault—he was completely in her power and she would not lose him! But others did not know of this and those who heard rumours to the effect, did not believe of this "charming" business. They simply grunted and said that if Nogan purposely wanted to keep the woman what could they do? And they did nothing but left him as an un-

desirable—a social pariah. Give a dog a bad name and hang him, was their policy.

I consulted a Malay "pawang" and told him my friend's case. He simply shook his head and said "Tuan, there is no remedy against this. If a Malay woman determines to love someone, she will and will make him love her too!" How true! Nogan really seemed to be infatuated with the woman. "But who knows, in course of time your friend may grow tired of her and even hate her. Then perhaps there will be an end for better or worse," said the pawang, ominously. So I waited, hoping the change would soon come. And it did come but good Lord! how did it end?

One day, I had just finished my dinner and was strolling on the lawn when a car stopped in front of my bungalow and Nogan walked in. It was a surprise but I was shocked at his appearance. He was but a shadow of his former self. He walked straight into the hall and dropped into a chair. "Look here, dada, I have kicked out that cursed woman for good." This was indeed good news and I said "Bravo! Now tell me everything," seating myself comfortably. "All right but wait a minute," he said and walking straight to the sideboard, he poured himself out a stiff whisky-soda from the decanter which I kept for the occasional visits of the sahibs. I looked at him with more and more surprise for I had never known him to drink. "Oh! never mind me," he said weakly. "The doctor advised me to drink and besides, I need to get over this darn..." He drank off the stuff in big gulps and puffed violently at the cigarette which I had offered him.

"Yes! I have kicked her off, thank God! But this is not the first time—I had kicked her off once before. Listen, dada, when first I got over the sickness I felt I could not do without her. The more I reproached myself, hated myself, the more she fascinated me, attracted me and held me under her spell. How often I thought I would abuse her and ask her to get out but the moment I looked into her eyes I was bereft of speech, and, instead of the fiery words which I had formulated, I only could mumble some silly incoherent words. In fact—I—I fell in love with her and when you repeatedly asked me to send her off, I felt annoyed. When other friends advised me, I began to hate them. Thus it was for some days. Then as I recouped my health and grew stronger, her spell over me seemed to grow lax and very soon my senses came back to me. I now resented her company and soon grew to hate her. Then one day, after coming back from office, I found her standing in front of my dressing table with a photo of my wife in her hand which was locked in my drawer. Instead of feeling that she had been caught red-handed, she quietly turned round and asked me 'who that was.' I simply said 'my wife,' whereupon she tore the picture into pieces and throwing them on the ground, trod upon them. I suddenly lost my temper and shaking her like a rat, I pushed her to the door and asked her to get out. She glared at me with her bewitching eyes for some minutes and then without a word, went away. I felt immensely relieved and happy. I thought I had done away with her. But strange to say, the next day and the day after that I felt a strange listlessness—I could not concentrate, I

could not sleep and worst of all, my thoughts continually turned to Zubaideh, for such is her name. On the third day I felt a terrible longing to see her and felt like a caged animal that had been bereft of his mate. At last I determined to go and see her that very night. I waited till it was about nine and then, with an electric torch, started. I imagine my surprise when, on reaching the gates of my compound I found Zubaideh standing as quiet as a shadow. She seemed to expect me! 'Tuan, you were coming to see me?' she asked in her caressing voice. I stammered 'Yes.' 'See, I have come,' she whispered and taking hold of my arm, led me to the house. So there you are—and thus it went on for another two months.

"One night I suddenly awoke without any apparent reason and found Zubaideh missing from the room. I got up slowly and peering into the hall, I saw her by the dim nightlamp, drop something into the tumbler of water which I always drank first in the morning. I caught hold of her wrist and shouted 'So, you are trying to poison me!' She recoiled as though I had struck her and said 'Poison?—Tuan never! it is only a love philtre!' Of course you don't expect me to believe all the stuff. An ungovernable frenzy seized me and running to the cupboard, I brought out my revolver, given to me by the firm. Showing her the weapon, I cried, 'Unless you get out this very minute, by Allah! I will shoot you.' " "Good Lad!" I said, lighting another pipeful. "Carry on." "Dada, I shall never forget the expression on

her face. At first she looked like a wounded deer and then her expression became rigid and she looked at me with such loathing and fury, that I felt devoid of any power and nervously laid down the revolver. Then quite as suddenly, she said softly and slowly, 'Tuan, you have returned hate for love. I a poisoner!' And she looked at me with those eyes which seemed to draw my very soul out. 'I go and will not return, but this I will not forget. One day, perhaps, some years after, you will need me, you will beg me to come,' she almost hissed those last words. With this she left me and disappeared.

"Of course, her last words mean nothing, but dada, this is what I don't understand--what made me stick to her all this time?" I pulled at my pipe and said in a matter-of-fact tone, "Of course, she must have charmed you." Nogan started and clutching my arm he asked hoarsely, "You mean it?" I nodded. "Well, have no fear; all this is over now." I said. "Cheer up!"

As I write these following lines a sort of sadness steals over me. To recollect and put down in black and white and in painful detail, events which happened long ago, events which are poignant of sad memories, events which seem not to belong to the twentieth century is, certainly a job which one can do but with a faltering pen. But in justice to the memory of Nogan I shall put down briefly but truly the gruesome details of the tragedy which was yet to befall him and which haunt me to this day.

Two years after the events narrated above, Nogan went home on ~~three months' leave~~. While

going home, he told me that if Fortune favoured him and he managed to get a job, he will not cross the 'seven seas and the thirteen rivers.' But none can overrule Kismet. Nogan did come back and with him came his girl-wife, for she was scarcely eighteen. Lila was an extremely intelligent girl and being city-bred, was wide awake. In a short time she had learnt the Malay language and had overcome the mysterious gloominess and strangeness which surround a young wife in a new country. In fact, Nogan and his wife very soon settled down to their sojourn in this country. Nogan's house, which was formerly the proverbial bachelor's den, now became a pleasant little home the magic of a woman's handiwork evident in the smallest details. It really made me glad to see them happy and contented, and what is more, so devoted to each other. The events of the former years never cast their evil shadows again and seemed to be forgotten. Neither Nogan nor I ever referred to that which was as an evil nightmare to us.

Nogan now seldom visited me and so I visited them at least once a fortnight. Nogan and Lila, who was a charming wife and an excellent housewife, always welcomed me and looked forward to my periodical visits, which of course, were not too often as to disturb the romance of the newly married.

One day, after about a year and a half, Nogan visited me on Bijoya Day. As we sat with our pipes after dinner, Nogan suddenly slapped my back and said, "Well, dada—this is—I mean I have—well, dash it all, I am going to become a father soon," he

blustered out at last. "That is good news to be certain." I said, pressing his hand. "I will volunteer to be the godfather."

As the nearest Maternity Hospital was thirty miles away, I advised Nogan to consult the Lady Medical Officer and take his wife to the hospital before the eventual day. Accordingly the next week Nogan took his wife to Ipoh, the capital, intending to keep his wife in the hospital till the event was over. The L. M. O. told Nogan, "Unless you have pots of money to waste, I wouldn't advise you to keep her here now as it will not be before five weeks." Therefore Nogan returned with his wife, thinking to take her after a month or so. But as ill luck would have it, three weeks after this, one night Lila's condition took a serious turn. Nogan with a man's ignorance, could not comprehend the seriousness of her state, had not the Tamil "ayah" vigorously asserted that the delivery would soon take place. Nogan was completely bewildered. There was no doctor nearby nor was there any midwife in this blessed village. He sent for the Malay "Tindal," Awang. The Malay said, "Tuan, there is no one here except a Malay woman who sometimes acts as a midwife but she..." he ended mysteriously, shaking his head. Nogan paid no heed to the old man's obvious scruples and ordered him to get her at once, whatever be her price.

Within half an hour, Awang returned with the Malay woman. Nogan met them in the hall. She was heavily veiled but she vaguely reminded him of somebody he didn't quite remember. Awang said that she demanded the "unheard-of price of \$50." "Can't

he helped," Nogan said and took her to Lila's room. It was a night of restlessness for Nogan. He could not sleep a wink, couldn't even sit down. He paced about the hall and smoked innumerable cigarettes. At last, at about 4 a.m. when he had stretched himself on the settee, the ayah informed "Tuan, a son is born to you." Nogan leapt up and made as if to rush to Lila's room but the ayah stopped him saying "But the 'Mah' is very bad." Nogan's sudden joy seemed to be blasted by the ayah's last news. He slowly went in and stood by Lila's bedside. She was sleeping but her appearance frightened him. She seemed to have grown an old woman within the last few hours. There was a deathly pallor on her face and a peculiar blackness about her eyes and lips. She was breathing slowly and furiously perspiring. Nogan touched her cheeks and withdrew his hand in alarm. She was having a terrible fever. He applied the thermometer— it was 104 degrees. This, more than anything, alarmed him. He sank in the chair, gazing at Lila. Suddenly he heard the wailing of the new-born babe. Instinctively he turned round and for the first time he saw the face of the Malay midwife. He stood petrified. It was none other than Zubaidah—the woman who had so tortured him years ago! She smiled at him maliciously, her dark eyes strangely glittering. Nogan felt frightened and with a start he remembered her last words—"I shall not forget, but you shall need me before long!"

However, there was nothing to be done now. He would send her off as soon as Lila was a little

better. Alas! little did he know that Lila could never be better again---would never again love him or her new born babe.

Lila's prolonged fever and pallor frightened Nogan. He understood something was seriously wrong with her---that it was something more than the usual effects of a child-birth. He therefore sent Awang on his motor-bike to Ipoh to fetch a doctor. Awang returned with Dr. Jake-Smith, a well-known European medical practitioner. Lila's condition was much the same as before. With the arrival of Dr. Jake-Smith, of whom he heard a good deal, Nogan's hopes rose high. When Nogan first described Lila's symptoms Dr. Jake-Smith seemed to be puzzled. He then examined her for about twenty minutes, after which he looked at Nogan speechless. He seemed to be completely mystified. "Look here, young man," he said gravely, "the delivery seemed to have come off without a hitch and as such, she should have been in good condition by now but, as it is she is seriously ill. The trouble is, I cannot for the life of me, understand her case. I am completely bowled out. In my medical practice of 37 years, never have I come across such a case. I am extremely sorry I am unable to do anything. The only thing is to await for developments." This was a thunderbolt to Nogan; he was completely crushed. Was he going to lose his beloved Lila? The very possibility maddened him!

While Dr. Jake-Smith was examining Lila with puzzled expression with Nogan looking on as if everything depended on his answer, the woman

Zubaideh was looking on boldly with defiant scorn on her face. When the doctor left puzzled and unsuccessful, she gave vent to a low diabolical laugh.

Nogan completely bewildered and down-hearted was standing in the verandah, leaning on the banister. His face in his hands, he felt a hand on his arm. Turning round, he found Awang, his cap in his hand. "Tuan!" he said almost apologetically, "the doctor could not do anything. May I bring a Malay doctor—may be, he could do something. I have suspicions, Tuan!" Nogan simply stared at him and said helplessly "Oh! All right!" Awang returned with an extremely old man, who, without any preamble, entered the sick room. He looked intently at Lila for some minutes. Then he dropped on his knees and peered into her eyes. He then straightened up and looked straight at Nogan. "She has been 'Shantaued' (Malay poisoning) and..." "And...?" asked Nogan steadily. "There is little hope—the poison has worked," he said resignedly clapping on his red cap.

"But who could have poisoned her?" asked Nogan, clutching at the old man.

"Allah knows," said the "pawang" looking at Zubaideh out of the corner of his eyes. This gesture did not escape Nogan.

He suddenly understood it all! The woman had 'Shantaued' Lila—poisoned her! It was her satanic revenge! He felt mad! He rushed at Zubaideh and shaking her like a rat, shouted, "You dirty bitch, did you do it?" She shook him off scolding him foully. In his fury Nogan snatched a

knife and slashed her arm. Zubaideh became a wildcat ; she scratched and cuffed Nogan, shrieking and scolding—a horrid sight. She suddenly stopped motionless. “I wanted to kill this woman—your wife. Now, I shall do something worse to her,” she hissed in a voice vibrant with venom and anger. She suddenly darted to Lila’s bedside and before anyone could move, she took a tiny bottle from under her breast and poured the contents into Lila’s mouth.

I feel it heart-breaking to describe the events that followed. They are extremely painful.

Lila recovered, but she became a hopeless lunatic!—Indeed, a fate worse than death! A horrible revenge! To this day, she is in the Lunatic Asylum—an object of pity and ridicule! Poor Lila! May God relieve you of your misery soon.

You will ask me now what happened to Nogan and the child? Nogan returned to India—a broken man! I have not heard from him—I do not know where he is. At least he should have let me know? And the child? Here is the strangest part of all! In the chaos that followed Lila’s tragedy, the child completely disappeared! Naturally the suspicions fell on Zubaideh, but notwithstanding the search of the police and others interested, no trace of the child could be found. Even to-day I try to find him! Perhaps he is dead—murdered foully by that horrid woman who wrecked the lives of three beings! Perhaps he is living—living to revenge, one day, the tragedy of his mother!

NEMESIS

THE District Officer, McIntan, bit his pipe viciously and growled: "Blast these natives." He kicked a footstool to the consternation of Ah Kow, the Chinese boy who was mixing a gin "pahit"; not to say that Ah Kow was unused to the tantrums of his "Tuan" but he didn't approve of a White man behaving thus. He slightly raised his eyebrows and shrugged his shoulders. Milford didn't fail to notice this. "Confound your celestial impudence," exclaimed Milford, more amused than angry. "Solly," grinned Ah Kow and retired discreetly. Milford never really felt annoyed with his boy, though Ah Kow seldom failed to show disapproval of his master's indiscretions and shortcomings with silent acquiescence or in a flood of pidgin English. The trouble with Milford was that he couldn't do without this fellow; for Ah Kow not only served and cooked but also mended his socks and reminded him of his Home mail. Even in matters of the State, Ah Kow would have to be consulted. He would put the tips of his fingers together, squint his funny slanting eyes and invariably give the right judgment.

"I will be lost without this d--d Chink," very often Milford confessed. In short, Ah Kow was his "Jeeves".

The cause of Milford's annoyance in this instance was a grave one; his indignation was righteous. It was a matter of the State and indirectly it affected his prestige.

"Well," he said with a resigning sigh, stretching his legs on the top of the speckless teak centre. "Well, I will consult Ah Kow." He rang the bell. Ah Kow appeared at his side with the quickness of Aladin's genie.

"Ah Kow, I want to talk to you--something very important. Sit down, will you?"

"Me no sit, thank you," said Ah Kow, coming and standing at-ease in front of his master.

"Please yourself," muttered Milford, filling his pipe. "You know Ah Kow, I have got to tour the 'Ulu' sometime this part of the year. In fact, I want to start early and avoid the rains. I was thinking of starting for Kampong Tilang next week. The route lies across the Bedong forest on the border of the Tilang river. It seems that this forest is haunted by a ferocious man-eating tiger. I personally don't believe a word of it, but the trouble is that I can't get any 'Tamil coolies to carry our 'barang barang' for love or money. I even assured them that Ferguson, the Forest Officer, and I would be carrying guns. Why, even Che' Moktar, my Malay assistant, you know, seems to be funking this job. Now, Ah Kow, how on earth, am I to start without coolies?"

During the recital, Ah Kow stood immobile, his eyes seemingly fixed on the high light of a brass vase. He put his finger tips together, squinted his eyes and said, "Tuan, get Malay coolies."

"Malay? But there aren't any, at least not in the P.W.D., or the Sanitary Board."

"You can get them from the Forest office," said Ah Kow, who could not pronounce his r's, to save his life.

"Folest? Oh, I see. You mean the Forest Department. Yes, but they aren't a particularly brave lot, are they?"

"No—but you give them plenty money and they will come," said Ah Kow, with a broad grin.

"I dare say you are right, old son; but I wonder if old Ferguson will spare any of his coolies. Anyway, Ah Kow, I will ring up your 'Folest Tuan.'"

II

Ah Kow's plan worked. Ferguson after a good deal of persuasion and mild threats gave in. In any case, he would have to give in to Milford. It didn't pay to fall foul of a District Officer in the long run. Besides Milford was a rising fellow and had lot of wires to pull. Ultimately it was arranged that a gang of Malay volunteers should be inspected by Milford next day.

At half past ten next morning Ferguson had his coolies lined up in parade order at the football "padang."

"Good morning, Ferguson," said Milford in his official tone, "is this the lot?"

"Yes, this is the best I could get," replied Ferguson, somewhat sulkily.

"Ah well, I suppose these fellows will do. Now to business; who is your 'tindal'?"

Ferguson shouted "Alang" and a tall Malay in the early thirties stood in front of Ferguson setting his cap well over his forehead. Milford spoke to Alang in Malay loud enough for the whole gang to hear. He explained his mission and his destination; the Company (*i.e.*, the Government) would pay five dollars per head and rations.

"How long will the men have to be away from their Kampong, Tuan?" asked Alang interpreting the questioning looks of some of the coolies.

"About a week, I should say. What do you think, Ferguson?"

"I dare say that will be ample, Milford," replied Ferguson promptly, having regained his equanimity.

"Well, Alang, get me fifteen men—the right sort, mind you."

"All right, Tuan," said Alang and went back to his gang.

The crowd closed round Alang, who harangued them at great length and with profuse gesticulations, pointing occasionally to Milford and Ferguson. Most of them were eager to join up, as it meant not only a sort of holiday but extra pay, free tobacco and an escape from the boredom of their routine work. So in spite of Alang's attempt at discipline and Ferguson's stern looks of disapproval, about thirty of them detached themselves from the crowd and rushed forward, each claiming that he should be taken.

"I didn't bargain for this, Ferguson," said Milford, very irritated.

"Neither did I. I will tell you what—just give

them the scare about the tigers in the Bedo forest and tell them that you only need the extra brave fellows."

"You think that will work?"

"You bet," said Ferguson, tightening his lip.

No sooner was this news imparted than a remarkable change took place in the attitude of the enthusiastic volunteers. A panic seized them. About twenty of them retreated in great haste; four or five of the suddenly remembered that they were family men with children and as such couldn't be away for such a length of time; and the rest wavered, looked at each other, Milford and Ferguson and at the nervous crowd behind.

Both the officers saw their faux pas and sought to rectify their mistake by giving them assurance of safety. Milford said, "Tuan Ferguson and I will be carrying loaded guns. The tiger won't dare come near, and if it does, why, surely twenty of us can kill one tiger."

At this, some of them wavered, picked up the courage and said, "In that case, we fear nothing—we will come," and ten of them fell into line.

"We will go if Alang goes with us," cried a few laggards.

"Of course, Alang is coming with us—who said he wasn't? Where is Alang?" roared Milford.

Alang at the moment was squatting on the grass and chewing the stem of a grass. He looked a changed man. His face was pale and chalky and his eyes terror-stricken. He looked as if he had seen a ghost.

"Alang, what is the matter with you? Come here," commanded Ferguson.

"Tuan--oh! Tuan, I can't go with you," said the man hoarsely.

"Can't go?" shouted Milford. "Of course, you are going with us. Can't go indeed, and why not?"

"Tuan, I dare not. I am afraid."

"Afraid? What of?"

"Tuan, the tiger--the 'hantu'---will kill me," he said hysterically.

The effect of this on the already faltering group was electrical. They dispersed rapidly again. Milford took Ferguson aside and said, "We can't allow this sort of thing, you know. This beggar Alang will ruin the morale of the whole crowd. As it is, it is bad enough with the Tamil coolies refusing point blank and now this pessimistic fool."

Ferguson went up to Alang and said nicely, "Now, now, Alang, don't be a child, we will all be carrying guns. You shoot quite well, don't you?"

"Yes, Tuan, I understand all that but I won't come, all the same. I will be killed," he said with wild panic in his eyes, staring all round the field as if he expected to see a tiger any moment.

"That's the limit; this has got to stop," said Milford fuming.

He walked up to the trembling Alang and said in an even voice but loud enough for all concerned to hear: "If you don't come, you will be instantly dismissed for disobeying orders."

The dismay and confusion on Alang's face was pathetic. Clearing his throat, Ferguson said, "I say, Milford, can't you--er--er--do without this fellow?"

"Of course, I can—I can do without the whole bally lot, but that is not the point. These natives should be taught a lesson. Seems to me the Malays are getting impudent."

"Now, Alang, you come with us or off you go this moment; not only that; I will sack the whole sickly lot of you. And, besides, why on earth are you such a coward?"

"Tuan, I am no coward. Allah knows, I will be eaten by a tiger if I go with you. Tuan does not know my humble history. For three generations the yellow-and-black devil has robbed us of many members of our family. The first victim was my grandfather, then my father and uncle. Last year it was my brother. And, Tuan, I am the only surviving male member. Allah help me! I don't want to die. I want to live—live!" exclaimed the man in a frenzy.

Milford turned away with a gesture of disgust.

"Ferguson, see that this fellow makes up his mind to come with us and also see that he gets us at least a dozen other fellows; otherwise, sack the lot at once."

Having delivered this peremptory order, Milford walked off towards his car.

III

Next morning after serving Milford his breakfast Ah Kow hovered round him, fidgeting and pottering about. Milford knew his man.

"What's up?" he asked, opening his daily "Tribune."

"Me say one thing. Hope master no angry," said Ah Kow, apologetically.

"Spit it out," answered Milford encouragingly.

"I think better Tuan not take Alang to the 'ulu'."

"Not take Alang? Now, how on earth did you know of all this trouble?"

Milford felt annoyed. "These natives have a way of ferreting things out," he said to himself, half aloud; and to Ah Kow, "And why shouldn't I take Alang?"

"He velly afraid of tiger. He say 'Remau' sure kill him."

"Oh fiddle-sticks!"

"No, Tuan, no humbug. There is 'hantu' in his family. His many relations eat la by tiger. Alang, him speak truth," said Ah Kow earnestly.

"You and your Oriental fatalism!" said Milford sarcastically.

Ah Kow said "Solly", and went about his work.

Early on Monday morning, the coolies and baggage in charge of Alang were sent in two P.W.D. lorries to Katty, the first stage of the journey, ninety-six miles away. Milford and Ferguson started after breakfast and reached there in the afternoon. The night was spent at the Rest House.

Next morning they started for Tusong, a small village, twenty-seven miles away. The motor road stretched only up to six miles and then--the inevitable Malayan bridle path. The Tuans went on

bicycles and the coolies continued on foot. They camped on the "Padang" of the village that night.

At dawn next day, they set out for their last lap, after the Malays' morning prayer. A fourteen mile bridle path leading to the Tilang river would bring them to the end of their journey on foot. The last four miles of this path passed through the ominous Bedong forest.

By the time they started the sun was already peeping over the distant hills. The first five mile were pleasant enough. Milford and Ferguson enjoyed the morning hike; the coolies were in big spirits bucked up by the bracing morning air. The path was muddy and sometimes degenerated and ran to shreds.

It was noon when they reached the outskirts of the forest. A halt was called here. The coolies cooked rice and curried chicken for their lunch. Milford and Ferguson had sandwiches and ice Tiger beers. They then lighted their pipes and fell to talking about their club and the forthcoming inter-State rugger match at Kuala Lumpur.

The march was resumed at three o'clock in the afternoon. Half-a-mile's tramp brought them to the very edge of the forest. They passed through a belt of para-rubber and gutta-percha trees and then quite suddenly the variety and the size of the trees changed. Huge big "Chenghai" and "Meranti" trees grew in close proximity entwined by creepers and thickly carpeted with an undergrowth of shrub and lalangs which now encroached upon their path. It was a tropical monsoonic rain-bearing forest.

The company now marched in single file, Ferguson leading and Milford bringing up the rear. Both of them carried loaded guns. The coolies who were quite jovial and talkative during the earlier part of the journey now became serious and alert. Alang, of course, was the most silent of the lot. He was given a gun and placed in the middle of the file, but he was ill at ease and obviously frightened. Any little sound or disturbance in the forest made him pale with fear and he would immediately come to a standstill and finger the trigger. This was bad for the company. It made others panicky and nervous. Even Ferguson and Milford felt jumpy. Milford tried to be "official" and even rude to Alang but it only made matters worse. He then tried to draw him into a conversation but Alang answered only in monosyllables or didn't reply at all.

"Better get the fellows on the move," shouted Ferguson, without looking back.

"O.K.," said Milford and ordered, "lakas jalan." The coolies started at a slow trot and most of them seemed to welcome it.

For one thing it stopped them discussing and spreading their fears and also it had a curious psychological reflex. They somehow shook off their nervousness and seemed to become more confident of themselves.

They had by now covered half the forest. To encourage them, Milford made this known. It had the desired effect. Alang heaved an audible sigh of relief and muttered, "Allah be praised." Another half-an-hour's march brought them within sight of the river.

Alang catching sight of the shimmering water at a distance exclaimed triumphantly, "I am saved, Allah be thanked. I am saved!" The others joined him in a chorus.

"Tuan, jangan mara," Alang said and started to sing. It was a Halleluiah.

The path now ran through an undulating area, covered with giant lalangs. A wind rose. Alang's song rose with the wind. The lalangs swayed and danced to the lilt of Alang's swansong.

There was a deeper rustle nearby. Ferguson noticed this; for a moment he wavered and then passed on. Milford, too, heard the disturbance but urged the coolies forward. Perhaps even they sensed a shade of danger but the red banks and the bubbling water of the Tilang river gave them courage. Only Alang didn't hear anything, didn't know anything.

His song rose to a crescendo. Suddenly it snapped and a wild frightened cry "Hantu! Remau! Hantu!" rent the air. A huge streak of black-and-yellow flashed through the air, pounced on one of the coolies, and jumped off into the giant lalangs with lightning speed. It was Alang! Alang—full of the joys of life only a few seconds before.

Five minutes elapsed before anyone quite realised what had happened. Then with a yell the coolies dropped their "barang" and stampeded. Milford and Ferguson rushed here and there in a vain attempt to stop them and then plunged into the jungle.

A couple of hours later they returned, tired, their legs bleeding from the cuts of the lalang

blades. They found the coolies seated in groups on the bank, sullen and trembling. They looked up at their masters' faces and knew the fate of their comrade. Silently, after dusk, they crossed the Tilang river.

IV

They returned after ten days by a devious route—a melancholy and tired company. The news of Alang's death had preceded them. A menacing crowd of Malays met them on their entry to town and almost besieged the two White men. A howling woman stood in front of Milford with a threatening attitude and accused him of sending her husband to his death. "His blood be upon your head," she cursed in Malay. The timely appearance of some stalwart Sikh policemen dispersed the crowd.

Milford was a changed man after Alang's death. He brooded, spoke little and neglected his meals. He drank heavily and scarcely stirred out of his bungalow.

On his return, he submitted his official report. He took the entire blame of the unfortunate affair on himself. There was no censure in the minute papers but a transfer was inevitable. Milford did not like the prospect but he realised that it was impossible to remain at the present station, as the Malays were kicking up a row. Besides, as Ah Kow had pronounced, he had "lost face" with the public.

A month later, there was a mild sensation at the club. Milford had resigned his post and left suddenly. No one seemed to know the place of his retreat. That night the members of the club forsook their Mah-jong and bridge tables and discussed "this Milford business" over their gin pahits.

"Blithering jackass, that's what I call him," remarked a "Burra-Sahib" among the planters. "Fancy going potty over a native's death," he concluded contemptuously. Ferguson's opinion was called for as he had first hand information of the affair. "I don't know—I think he did the right thing leaving," he said enigmatically.

* * *

A couple of weeks later news began to filter through that Milford was hunting big game in Pahang. He camped in the jungle and came to town only when he needed tobacco or ammunition. Soon he was forgotten by friends and foes alike in the gay whirlwind of the White man's life out in the East.

Ferguson, however, was the only exception. He kept in touch with the forest officers and rangers of all the States and thus kept himself informed of Milford's movements.

Three months later he received the disquieting news that Milford had pitched his tent in the hinterland of the Tilang river, within a couple of miles of the place where Alang was carried off. Ferguson immediately made up his mind to go there with

some of his forest guards, ostensibly on duty but actually to be within helping distance of Milford. But Kismet ruled otherwise. Ferguson did not have to undertake that trip after all, for the Chief Forest Ranger, Kampong Pisang, reported that the mangled and mutilated bodies of a White man and a Chinese were found in the lalangs near the Tilang river!

Was it a retribution or an expiation? Or, was it merely a cruel trick of fate?

REVENGE

THE s.s. "Monto" proceeded slowly along the treacherous Ganges Delta. The Captain came down to the deck and fumed and fretted at the slow tortuous progress of the ship but nothing could be done—the "Pilot Sahib" was in control and he knew best. But what did it matter after all? The next morning she was sure to be berthed at the Kidderpore Ghat and then—a week's well-earned holiday at Calcutta for all to laze about and visit their people or get drunk and fling their money about. After that again that scheduled, monotonous and almost always uneventful voyage to Rangoo, Penang, Singapore, Hong Kong and Japan.

The ship's doctor chafed not at the speed but did he look forward to his stay at Calcutta for he had nothing to do besides looking up a widow sister and a couple of chums. And while passengers and crew were packing up for the morrow, Dr. Faah lay in his bunk half dressed, listening indifferently to the wireless programme from Nirom. Suddenly he sat up. The dance music had stopped and from across the distant seas came the beautiful strains of a violin playing Schubert's Serenade. His face became transformed and he seemed lost in a reverie listening with bated breath. And as the invisible master-violinist played like a wizard on those strings and poured out the mournful soul-stirring chords of that immortal Serenade, a thrill ran through the back of his spine and he uttered ecstatically

"Beautiful! Divine!" His eyes welled and imperceptibly a tear rolled down his tanned cheek. And long after those strains had ceased he remained like a statue with his eyes closed. He had grown to love classical music in his solitude—Beethoven, Schubert, Litz—but this Serenade always affected him strangely. It laid bare his whole life—the love, the hope, the disappointment, the futility and above all, the pathos of a soul who once had everything and now had nothing.

There was a discreet knock at the door and Munshi, the bewhiskered and aproned Moslem boy entered salaaming. "Doctor Sahib, the dinner gong has gone. The Captain awaits your presence." With a start Dr. Lahiri jumped up, slipped on his mess jacket and set off for the dining saloon.

II

The next morning Dr. Sushil Lahiri was dressing up in his shore clothes when the ship's electrician, Aswini Mitre, came into his room. The latter was a comparatively newcomer to this boat but both knew each other well as they were at College together.

"Hello! Sushil, you going on shore?"

"Of course! I am. You seem surprised?"

"No, not at all. I merely thought that you will take your time—that is, go sometime in the afternoon," he said rather awkwardly.

"You see, Aswini, even a forlorn widower should have an occasional fling, what?"

"Well, I don't know. But why you call yourself a widower I don't know and if . . ."

"We won't discuss that," snapped Dr. Lahiri abruptly and into his eyes crept a hard and almost dangerous look.

"Well, guess I'll be going. See you later," said Mitre, making for the door.

"I say, Aswini," said Dr. Lahiri standing, "if you are not in a mighty hurry, I will join you a jiffy."

"O.K.," muttered Mitre and made him comfortable. It took five minutes for Dr. Lahiri to fix his tie and get into his white gaberdine suit. Then with a small leather suit case in one hand and a Malacca cane in the other he left the room followed by Mitre. They both chatted gaily and sauntered down the passage to the ship's gangway. Suddenly with one foot on the steps, Dr. Lahiri stopped short.

"Blast it!" he muttered angrily, setting down his bag.

"What's up?" asked Mitre, looking round the cause of his companion's annoyance.

"Just like me! I have forgotten to hand in my report to the Big Boy!"

"Bah! do it some other time," said Mitre shrugging his shoulder.

"Some other time? Good Heavens! You don't know the Captain well enough. He is the devil-fellow for punctuality, discipline and all that sort of starchy rot!"

"Now," said Mitre gasping, "I am in a frightful hurry. Peep into this bag quick, take your dues, unless you will let me—"

"If it is your bag, why—"

"Ah! cut it out. Fellow like you will examine your own bag! Besides it is the Doc's and he has something for your greedy eyes."

"Ah! That makes a difference—I trust no doctors," said the greasy Anglo-Indian with a grin.

Mitre set the bag on the table and unlocked it. He pushed back the catch but the latch would not fly open. The lid seemed jammed. He cursed Dr. Lahiri under his breath and gave the lid a couple of hard slaps with the palm of his hand. That did the trick. Then with a jerk he threw back the cover and—suddenly, like Jack in the Box, a black sinuous object flew out and jumped at Mitre's throat! With a terrible yell of agony and fright he jumped but fell to the ground in a heap the next moment. Blood trickled down his throat and he lay senseless. The black slimy creature slithered away and disappeared under some packing cases. It was a cobra! For a few minutes everyone was flabbergasted. The people on the outer ring of the crowd perhaps didn't even see the reptile but the folks nearby suddenly woke up and then pandemonium broke loose. They stampeded and broke down the customs barrier. The officials shouted and swore, the women and children shrieked and ran wildly. McGowan was the first to recover his equilibrium. He got hold of a couple of simpering assistants and carried Mitre back to the ship. The Captain was

informed and the Doctor sent for. The Captain was so excited when he saw the unfortunate victim that he blubbered and ran back to his den and gulped down a stiff one.

Dr. Lahiri came on deck leisurely but when he saw the prostrate form of Mitre, he ran forward and knelt down by his side.

"What happened?" he asked anxiously, examining the patient. McGowan related the horrible incident in his precise official jargon. Dr. Lahiri didn't seem to hear most of it. He stared at the inert figure as if he had seen a ghost and then he looked up, his face drawn and chalky.

"Why, he is dead!" he said hoarsely, looking up at the crowd.

"How did it happen?"

When he heard the gruesome details he jumped up and cried, "Snake in my bag? Impossible! I packed it myself!"

"But the dead viper did fly out of your bag and that's that!" replied McGowan with challenging finality.

"You must be mad!" almost shouted Dr. Lahiri. "I tell you I packed and locked up the bag almost a couple of hours ago. It is impossible, McGo..."

"Well, that is for the Police to decide," replied McGowan ominously. Obviously, there was no love lost between the two men. Dr. Lahiri had the dead man removed to the ship's hospital and then shut himself up in his room.

Half-an-hour later, the Police came and a sort of preliminary enquiry was held in the dining

saloon with the Captain and other Officers present. Statements were taken down and questions asked. Dr. Lahiri related the morning's incident and explained what had stopped him from going ashore; he insisted that the snake couldn't have emerged from his bag as he had himself locked it. On the other hand McGowan and the customs people swore that the moment the bag was opened the snake sprang out from within it.

"Have you any enemies, Dr. Lahiri?" asked the Assistant Commissioner of Police.

"Every man has his enemies," answered Dr. Lahiri cryptically.

"I mean--on this boat?"

"Not that I know of--but who can tell?" he said with a shrug.

"H'm. By the way, do you leave your room unlocked usually when you go to deck or on your rounds?"

"I always leave it unlocked."

"So it might have been possible for someone to enter your room and put the snake into your bag."

"Quite! That seems to be the only obvious explanation," said Dr. Lahiri with some heat.

"Well, that is for the Coroner to decide. Now tell me, when did you last touch your bag? I mean when did you lock it up?"

"About sevenish in the morning."

"And did you leave your room between then and the time when you intended to go ashore?"

"Oh yes, half a dozen times at least--for my bath, my breakfast and--"

"Well that is all I want to know," said the Police officer closing his note book.

The Coroner's enquiry took place after four days. Dr. Lahiri, McGowan, Munshi and some of the ship's crew were questioned, but nothing new came to light. The Captain of the ship paid a glowing tribute to the dead man and said that, in his opinion, some lunatic had planned and carried out that ghastly murder. But the theory was untenable. For until the last moment, no one, not even Dr. Lahiri knew that the bag would have to be opened by the unfortunate victim. Mitre was only asked to take the bag down on the spur of the moment. It was therefore obvious that whoever put the snake into the bag, intended it for Dr. Lahiri. Only Fate intervened and switched away the wrong man. It was brought out in the court that the snake, which had been captured, belonged to a species of King Cobra found only in Malaya or Upper Burma.

A verdict of "Death by misadventure" was returned.

The Police, however, did not feel quite satisfied and they determined to keep their ears and eyes open.

III

The seven days of shore leave passed quickly, unhappily for most of the ship's crew. The s.s.

"Monto" set sail again on her Eastern tour. Everyone felt the absence of Mitre keenly for he was an extremely popular man with his original yarns and his leg-pulls. Dr. Lahiri was hard hit by this tragedy. He walked about like an automaton going on his rounds, scarcely conscious of anything or anyone. He shut himself up in his cabin most of the day and Munshi, his cabin boy whispered, "The Doctor Sahib has gone berserk—drinking like a fish." It looked as though he had imposed upon himself the responsibility of his friend's death. Meantime the Captain held enquiries and investigations to find out the probable culprit—obviously an enemy of Dr. Lahiri. But everyone on board ship seemed favourably disposed towards the doctor. Dr. Lahiri was questioned again by the Captain and his brother officers but he gave evasive answers and refused to discuss the matter.

One morning, when the ship's chart showed two hundred and ninety miles from Rangoon, Dr. Lahiri sent for Munshi.

"Tell me Munshi, how long have you known me?"

Munshi blinked; remembering facts was not his strong point and besides he was not used to questions like this.

"Long time, Sahib. 'Punj—das—pandhara' years, perhaps more, ever since you rescued me from that gang of 'Goondas' and thugs."

"Yes, seventeen years. Have you ever known me to do harm to anyone—for example, anyone board the ship?"

"Never, Sahib. You were like a—a—brother to us."

"Thank you," said Dr. Lahiri with a wan smile. "And yet, I have an enemy on board this ship!" he said standing up and pacing up and down the room.

"You mean—the—the—snake business, Sahib?" asked Munshi with a shade of fear in his eyes.

"Yes, I mean the devil who put the snake into my bag hoping to kill me!"

"But Allah be praised! You are safe."

"But what about my friend? Munshi, you must help me to find this unknown enemy of mine."

Munshi looked at the doctor with a pained expression on his face and then meeting the other's gaze he looked down and drew patterns on the floor with his toe crooked. For some time there was a silence and a change came upon Munshi. He clenched and unclenched his fists and the muscles of his neck stood out in cords; obviously some strong emotion was disrupting him. Doctor Lahiri, engrossed in his own thoughts, failed to notice the storm signals.

"Why don't you answer me?" he asked impatiently.

"Sahib," he said taking a step forward, "you are safe. The man is dead and the case is over. Why need you worry yourself?" he finished with a note of entreaty.

"You spineless idiot! Am I a coward or a woman?" he said scathingly.

"Sahib, do not taunt me," said Munshi sternly.

shedding his humility. "I am not an idiot. I know who put the snake into your bag!"

"You know—who?" he asked hoarsely, a shade of nagging fear in his eyes. Munshi took a couple of steps nearer and stood towering over the doctor.

"You! You did it. You!" he hissed bringing his face nearer.

Dr. Lahiri recoiled as if struck a blow. His face was white and his eyes portrayed abject fear.

"You liar!" he shouted and suddenly with a jump he flew at Munshi's throat. The giant Pathan lifted the doctor almost bodily and threw him into his bunk. Dr. Lahiri sat, huddled up, panting and cowering like an animal that was cornered, the saliva running down the corners of his mouth.

"I am no liar," said Munshi quietly regaining his equanimity. "The snake was in your cabin ever since you left Singapore."

"What! I—I—will—"

"Don't interrupt and don't threaten, Doctor Sahib; I am your humble servant but at this moment I am stronger than you are because I am speaking the truth. You must have picked up the snake at Singapore. How did I know it? One day I was tidying up your room when I heard strange noises coming from within your violin case. I thought it must be some cockroaches or rats. I opened it and I nearly got killed! Your violin I found in your chest of drawers. I therefore deduced that none other but you kept the unholy creature there and that perhaps you were taking it to present it to the

Calcutta Zoo. Now I know it was you who put the reptile into your bag!"

"To kill myself?" asked Dr. Lahiri with a contemptuous laugh.

"No Sahib, to kill Mitre!" remarked Munshi quietly.

"A fertile imagination! You must have been taking hashish," he continued regaining his composure.

"You know best, Doctor Sahib," said Munshi looking up straight. The challenge in his eyes compelled the doctor to lower his gaze. "And why should I want to kill a man who was an intimate friend of mine?"

"That, sahib, I know not and care not" replied Munshi with a shrug.

"H'm and pray, why did you suppress all this at the enquiry?"

Munshi looked at the carpet and shuffled his feet. "It is difficult to explain. I was on the horns of a dilemma. On one side lay truth and duty, on the other—gratitude and honour. We, of our race, do not betray one whose salt we have partaken of. Now I find that you taunt and insult me. I was a soft fool to have been swayed by time-honoured sentiments," he said bitterly.

This outburst had a spontaneous effect on Dr. Lahiri. His body sagged; his face became colourless and twitched with emotion. "Come nearer, Munshi, and listen to the tale of a man whose soul has been damned eternally. Listen to me and then do what you like.

"Eight years ago I was married to a young girl

of seventeen. She was just budding into womanhood. Of course, we never met before our marriage day and it was quite sometime before we could bring ourselves to think of each other as husband and wife. She was a wonderful girl and soon I fell madly in love with her and she, too, reciprocated my affection. Two years after our marriage I took up this job much against my will, I must say, but the wolf had to be kept away from the door. This meant that from then on we could have each other only for a short week once every two months. We felt these separations very much. My wife wanted me to get a shore job but jobs were not for the mere asking those days. Besides, the steamer job was cushy and the pay attractive. I rented out a small flat in Calcutta for my wife and here she lived with my widowed sister and her child. To relieve her of her ennui during my absences, a good many of my relatives and friends kept her company and occasionally took her out. Things went on like this for about three years and then something happened that changed the whole course of my life. One day, on my return from my periodical absence I went home direct as usual and was met not by a smiling and eager wife but by my sister—disheveled and hysterical. I knew instinctively that something dreadful had happened and my heart sank within me. But never by the wildest stretch of imagination could I dream of what was in store for me. It was quite sometime before I could get my sister to speak coherently and intelligently and when she did—I stood like a lifeless object carved out of stone

A fortnight before my return my wife had disappeared! She had left a note to say that she was going away on her own accord and that it would be futile to search for her. Disappeared! Why and where—neither my sister nor I could answer. My sister had done all she could to locate her except notifying the Police; this, to avoid a family scandal. To inquisitive friends and relatives we gave out that my wife had gone on a visit to her mother at Delhi. I spent my week of shore leave in a frantic search for her, travelling night and day. I exhausted all the possible places but—she had vanished into the thin air! I took a month's leave from the Company and taking some of my friends into confidence, including Mitre, we searched for her in every nook and corner of Bengal and India. Munshi, for three years I have been searching for her throughout the East; I did not even know if she was dead or alive—until about two months ago.

"At our last stop at Rangoon on our outward journey, I fell in one night with a set of young bloods who were notorious in town for their escapades and their bacchanalian parties. They were, celebrating that night for something or other and, you may feel shocked when I tell you, that I let myself go with an abandon that was foreign to my make-up. Perhaps it was the reaction of long pent-up feelings. The party was held in the country house of one of my hosts and there was much merry-making, drinking and gambling with high stakes. It was past midnight when a party of three women and two men joined us. It seemed to me that the women had

the unmistakable stamp of the demi-monde carved on their features and within a few minutes I discovered that I was not wrong. And, Munshi, wretched man that I was, I recognised one of them as my long-lost wife!

"Never have I seen a person change so much in the course of a few years. Gone were the beauty of her chiselled features, gone were the charms of her slim figure, her lady-like poise and restraint and—Oh! it was horrible! I found her a coarse, plump and dowdy woman, covered with tawdry trinkets and reeking of cheap scent. Her raucous laugh and her vulgar speech betrayed the abysmal depth into which she had sunk. I wouldn't have recognised her if it were not for a peculiar facial gesture of hers which she still retained and which I knew so well. When she saw me for the first time she blanched for a fleeting second and I am sure she recognised me but not by the flicker of an eyelid did she betray herself. I determined to wrest the truth out of her that night. With this idea, I pretended to be infatuated with her and stuck to her like a leech. This was not lost upon my friends (fools that they were!) who were happy to see that I had at last shed off my restraint and my outward show of innocence and become one of them. But what did it matter? They shouted their approbation and drank a toast to her. 'Nilima!' one of them guffawed, 'you have captured a saint!' She laughed loudly and pecked me. I kept up my pretence well and, after a couple of hours or so, I managed to steer her unobtrusively into

the unkempt garden behind and thence to my hotel.

"And there she broke down and fell at my feet, weeping with the anguish of a lost soul. Strange to say, I didn't in the least feel moved —only I kept on demanding the truth! At last she told me her story haltingly, her whole frame trembling and her voice quivering with emotion.

"Sushil, oh! Sushil! What can I say? What shall I say? I prayed to God that you may never see me in my shame! But a cruel providence brought us together in the most unexpected fashion. Sushil, I loved you and you adored me. But there came a serpent in the guise of a handsome and dashing young man. During your absences he took me out to theatres and pictures and made love to me violently. I was young and starving for love and life and he aroused in my budding womanhood a warmth and passion that transformed me into a new person. I became his—body and soul and one day, in a moment of weakness, I eloped with him, without any premeditation. He kept me in a little-known suburb of Calcutta and I didn't even peep out of the house for fear of being discovered by any of you. Such was my infatuation. After six months he brought me to Rangoon and one day left me quite suddenly. The rhapsody was broken! It was the same old story. He had grown tired of me and my physical charms. I was completely stranded but I made no effort to reach him or beg him to support me, though I knew his home address and where he worked. I had sinned and this was my penalty.

Sushil, I then realised what a fool I was! I was an outcast—a pariah!

"Once I thought I would return to you and throw myself at your feet and beg for your mercy but I still had a vestige of decency left in me; I knew the shame, the humiliation, the unhappiness you would suffer if I came back then. For what is more loathsome, more despicable to our people than a fallen woman! An untouchable! Better were I dead to you. I tried to take my life but the Fates decreed otherwise. I tried to lead an honest life but what could I do? I had not been trained for anything, and I couldn't even get the job of a domestic servant for people were suspicious of a good-looking Hindu girl of my age, obviously unattached and of good family. I will spare you the painful stages of my downfall; I took the path of easy virtue and started to drift away like a flotsam till—till you find me what I am! Sushil, my husband, kill me—kill me and save me!' she cried with her head on my feet.

"I kill you? You are not mine to kill. Otherwise—but you must suffer—suffer!' I hissed pushing her off with my foot.

"Who is that man? Who is that serpent?' I shouted in a terrible voice. She cowered and shrank away. I caught hold of her and almost strangled her. 'Who? Who?' I kept on shouting.

"MTRR! MTRR! Aswini Mitre!' She cried falling to the floor in a dead swoon.

"God help him! By a serpent shall he die! I swore and left the hotel.

"Munshi, I was a student of crime psychology in my younger days. I found that every man is a potential killer and has the power to kill; only very often, he doesn't know it. All he needs besides that knowledge is courage. I whipped up my courage and for days and weeks I brooded and planned and at last evolved, what seemed to me, an almost perfect crime. And so, you see Munshi, I killed Mitre—killed him by a serpent. Yes, I killed him. I brought the snake from the Federated Malay States. I put it into the bag and by a cunning device handed it over to him to be opened by himself at the customs gate in broad daylight. I had tampered with the latch and I knew exactly what a semi-starved sleeping cobra would do when rudely disturbed. No one would ever dream of connecting me with this grim accident—it was my own bag and obviously the snake was meant for me, put there by some unknown enemy of mine. Most people on board the ship knew that I was going on shore that morning and some of the deck hands saw the incident of my handing over the bag to Mitre, my going ashore being stopped for official reasons, so to say. And I took care not to fake that reason, either. I actually kept back my report and handed it to the Captain with my apologies, after Mitre left me. The Police and the public now believe that there is somewhere an enemy of mine who wanted to get rid of me but that, through the intervention of some unknown power, I was saved and poor Mitre killed. This is exactly what I had planned for. All I have to do after this was to

pretend to be overwhelmed by Mitre's death and hold myself as the indirect cause of his death, I almost succeeded in everything I had planned but Kismet betrayed me into your hands. Munshi," said the doctor standing up erect, "Munshi, I am in your hands. Do what you will!"

During the narration of this grim tale Munshi was seated with his chin resting on the palm of his hand looking at the floor. He remained like that even after Dr. Lahiri had stopped. He looked up suddenly like a man who had seen a nightmare and he stood up facing the doctor.

"Mitre sinned damnably. But what a horrible punishment, Doctor Sahib! May Allah preserve your soul!" he muttered, in a scarcely audible tone and left the room.

A CHANGE OF TIDE

THE recognition was mutual though we last met about fifteen years ago. Outwardly he hadn't altered very much except that he stooped a little and his eyes were somewhat bleary. But somehow I felt that there was a great change in the man—how or what I couldn't define; something elusive and intangible. Perhaps it was the absence of that reckless flash in his eyes; perhaps it was the absence of that arrogant and yet not unfriendly mien of his race. I do not know. But there was no change in his hearty handgrip or in his overwhelming hospitality.

It was a chance meeting at a roadside petrol kiosk. I was in a hurry to reach Alor Star before nightfall but Tuan Haji Syed Abdul Rahman bin Nafiz Hussein insisted on my having tea with him. There was no way out of it. He jumped into my car and we turtled along towards his large country house five miles away. He remained silent during the greater part of the journey but I found him looking queerly at me.

"What is up? Do I look funny?" I asked without rancour.

"Oh no—no, not at all. Just looking over you. You know, you have changed so much. I knew you as a boy and now you are a man."

I remembered his mansion. It was a huge whitestone building with French windows and it did not take me long to reach the massive gates. As

I swung into the broad sweeping drive Tuan Rahman suddenly tugged my sleeves and whispered "Stop!"

"Why, what is the matter? Surely I haven't made a mistake," I asked pulling up the car immediately.

"Oh no, not at all. Only--only--er--you see--I don't live here any longer," he answered, avoiding my eyes.

I backed the car to the main road and was about to change gears when he stayed my hand and said, "No need; leave the car here and we will walk across." I parked my car on the grass edge and followed him across the road to a narrow path running zig-zag across a rubber estate. He stopped in front of a raised wooden bungalow of the Malay type with attap roofing and distempered walls and said in his former grandiloquent manner, "Welcome my friend. My humble abode is yours. Enter."

"After you," I said and followed him in.

I felt surprised and intrigued at this but I thought it imprudent to betray my curiosity at this stage. The floor of his sitting room creaked as we entered and we seated ourselves in large cane chairs which had seen better times. There was a large carpet on the floor; it had once been magnificent and had adorned the drawing room of his large mansion. It was now moth-eaten, mouldy and stained. In a corner stood a huge teak sideboard with Italian glass--the only remaining evidence of his once palmy days. Gone were the beautiful Chinese ebony furniture inlaid with mother-of-pearls and the soft expensive Persian rugs; gone

were the rare Javanese brass and the Malay krises with intricately-worked handles of gold and silver. It was humiliating--this grim poverty of a man who once spoke in millions and entertained Sultans. Involuntarily I sighed.

"Yes, Tuan," he said with a hollow laugh. "Yes Tuan, Time plays many a cruel trick." I started; I had not in the least intended to transmit my thoughts to Syed Rahman but perhaps the dismay and surprise in my eyes betrayed me. Now that he had broached the subject, I determined to probe deeper.

"We are old friends, Tuan Syed Rahman, if I may take the liberty of saying so. Tell me, what has brought about this--er--change?"

"Ruin, you mean? Ah well, one thing and another and mainly the slump," he said with an utter lack of conviction and in so matter-of-fact a tone that I found myself not fully believing him.

"Come to think of it, everybody is blaming the slump," I remarked, fishing for more news.

"Tuan, you know not fully about it, having been away in Europe so long. It was like an avalanche--it was devastating. I am one of those who were crushed."

Again I noticed the absence of spite, of venom, of blasphemy which one expects from victims of ill fortunes or financial crashes. The man was no cynic. Perhaps he was a superb actor. My reflections were cut short by the arrival of tea and a large brass tray containing fruit and cocoanut cakes. We drank tea from cheap garishly-coloured Japanese

cups and helped ourselves with the cakes with our fingers. I must say that the tea was good but the cakes were coarse, over-sweet and typically Malay. After tea Inche Rahman offered me a native hand-made cigarette, a cheap stuff that invariably gave a racking cough to the novice. Pleading a bad throat I refused it, at the same time taking one of my own. Perhaps Inche Rahman suspected the real reason of my refusal and said, "My heart—it is awfully bad. I find these cigarettes soothing," with a brave smile. There was an unforgettable pathos in his voice and in his eyes had crept a look, pathetic and almost beseeching. I looked away and regretted my snobbishness. What a stiff come-down for a man who only a few years ago refused to touch anything but "Abdullah" or "Balkan Sobrani"!

Suddenly my eyes fell on a tattered golf bag which hung on a nail in the wall and quite as suddenly I remembered that Inche Rahman was a first rate golfer—a plus man! I walked over to inspect the contents. A glance told me that the clubs had not been used for ages. The mashie was battered beyond recognition obviously used as a hammer by some children; the head of the driver was chipped off a dozen places and the irons were coated with a black brittle rust. I felt I had to say something. "Don't you play golf these days?" I asked somewhat fatuously.

"Obviously not, as you must have discovered," he remarked quietly.

"Then, what is the earthly use of preserving that?"

"Ah! Perhaps to remind me of my quondam prowess at golf; perhaps to help me remember my once halcyon days," he remarked with a somewhat forced laugh. I could never imagine this stalwart Arab capable of harbouring such maudlin sentimentality. I must say that all this camouflage only aroused my curiosity and strengthened my disbelief in his well-assumed sangfroid. Besides it was getting late and I was beginning to feel frightfully bored. But I determined to stick to my guns and wrest the truth out of him. Most unreasonable of me, I must say, but that is how I felt at the moment. I stood up and said, "Well, thanks for your tea. I must be going."

"What! So soon?" he asked, jumping up.

"Yes, I have a long stretch to do and besides, what is the use of my sticking round here any longer when you don't treat me as a friend?"

"What do you mean?" he asked seriously, a challenge in his eyes. I saw that the shaft had gone home. "You are not telling me the truth," I answered brusquely. For a moment or two he stared hard at me. Suddenly a terrifying change came over him. His face became tomato-red and clenching his fists he towered menacingly over me.

"You son of an Infidel! Who are you to persecute me thus?" I was befuddled. I stood rooted to the ground for what seemed an eternity; then I turned on my heels and walked out. Hardly had I gone a few yards than he ran out of the house and caught me by my hands. His face was pale and his eyes were glistening.

"Forgive me my cursed Arab temper. Forgive me, my friend. I am a dog of a fellow to have treated you thus," he almost whined, beating his breast with the palm of his hand. I relented and walked back, half-dragged by Syed Rahman. He forced me to a seat and called for some soft drinks.

"Tuan—I will tell you all—everything. It is no good keeping it back; this damned secret has been eating up my vitals. I will tell you everything now," he said with an almost childish eagerness.

II

"All things have a beginning, Tuan. My story begins with that golf bag and..."

"Surely you are not pulling my legs?"

"No, no, can't you understand? This is no joking matter," he said with a serious gesture.

"Twelve years ago I was a member of the Tanjong Golf Club. You know as well as I do that this Club is the most exclusive Golf Club in the East. I do not boast but within a year I became the champion of that Club and the following year I was elected Captain. It has been said, Tuan, that Europeans do not associate with Asiatics freely out in this country. I must say I found things quite different. I was popular with most members and was treated equally well by all. Perhaps it was because I was a man of means and independence

perhaps it was because of my golf. As a result, I motored down almost every other day to Penang and spent my evenings there. Now, Penang has always been a veritable paradise to the tourists; specially the Americans, who are not only charmed by the climate and the gorgeous scenery but also, I suppose, find the Malay people and their customs bizarre to a degree of amusement. And the Tanjong Golf Club with its perfect links did not escape the notice of the Americans. A good many of them invaded our Club and contrived to play off a game or two as the guests of some member or other. One afternoon a young American woman turned up at the Club and demanded to see the Captain. I tell you, Tuan, that when I saw her I was pleasurable shocked for I had never seen a prettier woman!

"'Pretty' is a tame word to describe her. She was a gorgeous creature with her deep copper hair, the brownest eyes and a complexion that beggared description. She was about twenty-three, of medium height, not over slim and had a face that was a perfect oval. Her husky voice added to her glamour. She was dressed in a pair of shorts and a blue blazer with the badge of a famous American Girls' College. And she was so vivacious that I at first put her down as French.

"'Say, Captain, can I play over these links of yours? I have carted round my sticks.'

"'Know anyone in this Club?' I asked formally.

"'Nope,' she answered with a pout.

"'Then I am afraid it can't be done,' I said feeling rather sorry to disappoint so fair a girl.

"What! have I got to know someone?"

"Why, yes."

"And I don't know anybody! Say, brother, can't you let me play just this once? I wanted ever so much to tell the folks at home that I played in the best course out in the East, see?"

"She was pathetic. Much as I wished to help her, I couldn't break the Club rules which allowed only members and their guests to play. An idea struck me.

"I say, Miss—er—"

"Hopkins—Muriel Hopkins; call me "Hop".

"I say Miss Hopkins, don't I know you, what?"

"For a moment or two she was bewildered but when she got the hang of it, she opened her eyes wide and whistled.

"Say Captain, that's a swell idea. Whoopee!" she shouted exclaiming a miniature war dance.

"Can I play now?" she asked, peeling off her coat.

"You bet. And the Captain of the Club will be honoured if you will give him a game."

"My fair guest with her golden curls and boyish hips created a mild sensation in the Club. Her game was as good as her looks. She had a stunning drive and she was a wizard with the putter. And, incidentally, she had a beautiful pair of ankles. The first nine holes didn't whet her appetite. It was a fine afternoon and we decided to play further. Forgive the digression, Tuan, but it is a funny world when you come to think that small things sometimes change the whole course of a man's life," he said with a wan smile.

"Quite! nothing is more true," I muttered, lighting a cigarette.

"Thank you. Had we not played further that day, God knows, I might not have been the unhappy man that I am to-day. We had driven off from the thirteenth tee when her ball fell into a bunker, the most formidable in the whole course. 'I will get it out in a jiffy, you watch,' she said, hastening towards the spot. It wasn't so easy as all that. On closer inspection we found it embedded in the soft clayey bank of the bunker. She lost three strokes in getting it free and Heavens! she swore like a cabman. She swung her niblick savagely and hit the ball. Then it-----it all happened in a flash! The ball stuck a stony patch with terrific force, rebounded and hit her on her temple! She dropped down senseless with a moan. I was in a panic. There was no one in sight and I didn't know what to do. I gathered her head on my lap and bathed her forehead with my handkerchief dripping with perspiration and fanned her with my felt hat. I sent off the caddies at a run, one to fetch some ice from the Club house and another to instruct my chauffeur to get the nearest doctor. There was a bluish bump, the size of a large marble, on her temple and she was breathing heavily. The boy came panting with the ice ten minutes later and this I applied on her head and eyes and dropped a piece into her mouth. She came round slowly and opened her eyes after a few minutes.

"Where am I? What hap..."

"Now, now, steady sister, you are all right,"

I said softly pushing back her curls. She moaned and lay quiet. Within half an hour she was laughing and cursing herself faintly.

"Now! What have I got on my forehead—a pumpkin?" she cried, fingering the bump for the first time. It was now getting dark and I suggested returning to the Club but she pleaded weakness and wanted to rest a little longer. I sat on the lawn and she stretched herself with her head on my knee and for a while there was silence between us. The sun dipped behind the distant crouching hills and soon a pale crescent moon and the stars appeared. The mosquitoes hummed and the crickets screeched and a soft wind brought us the smell of the tropical honey-suckle. And as we sat there in silent communion, I felt that we were the only two human beings in this wide wide world and that I had known this frail white woman from the beginning of time. Perhaps she felt the same too. And then with a profound shock I realised that I was beginning to fall in love with this girl—this girl whom I met only a few hours ago—a stranger, a foreigner, an unbeliever in the Holy Koran! But I thought not of these things, nor of my wife and children a few miles away. A madness seized me Tuan, and I kissed the girl madly, wildly and whispered, 'I love you,' perhaps a hundred times as in a trance. And wonder of wonders, she lay in my arms and returned my kisses passionately.

"Oh! Captain, I do love you so," she whispered and there were tears in her eyes. Poor girl, she didn't even know my name or who or what I was

I didn't either—but what did it matter? She was a woman, I a man. We talked of ourselves, of our folly and what lay in store for us in the future. I told her that I was married and had a couple of children but that didn't seem to worry her in the least. She, in her turn, told me that she was engaged to a boy out in the United States and that her father was a successful stock broker. She was out on a tour with an elderly couple who were family friends and who had undertaken to chaperon her.

"But all that—Dad, Mum, Jimmy and our old home in Connecticut seem to me a dream, so far away. But you are real," she sighed, feeling my arms, my fingers and my head. That night we left the Club at about ten and I took her to her hotel. She introduced me to her travelling companions and they were delighted to meet me and invited me to lunch with them the next day. For a couple of days we went out together going places—the Snake Temple, the Hills, the Chinese Temple and the Waterfalls. It was Heaven! Then came the day of parting but would you believe it, Tuan, that such was her infatuation for me, (I didn't dare to think that it was love, then) that she refused to leave Penang! They were bound for Japan and she persuaded her friends, I don't know how, to leave her behind and pick her up again on their way home."

"What! she stayed back?" I asked finding it impossible to believe.

"Yes she stayed back.

all too romantic to be true—but it was true. She remained in Penang for good and—well, suffice it to say, that she became my mistress, and...

"Mistress? But an honourable man of your..."

"Hold! do not pass judgment without hearing my case in full," he said with some heat. "What could I do?" he continued in a tired voice.

"I offered her marriage and a home but she would have none of it. She said it wasn't fair to my wife and children even though the Holy Koran allowed a man more than one wife. Besides, she didn't feel like getting converted to Mohammedanism to become my legal wife for it is laid down that no son of Islam shall marry a non-believer. Not that she was a devout Christian, nor had she any strong religious convictions but all this seemed unnecessary.

"What does it all matter, as long as I am yours?" she would tell me.

"Yes, she was mine, mine body and soul and she cast not her eyes on any other man, black, white or brown. But not for a moment did we dream that grim tragedy crouched menacingly behind us."

III

"Then how came tragedy?" I asked, for the story did not take the obvious turn I expected.

"How came tragedy in our idyll, you ask me? I will tell you now. Tuan, the limbs of Satan are

legion but I didn't know that there lurked one near at hand. I must say that, being a man of the world, I didn't expect this affair to remain unknown. A liaison of this nature was rich food for all gossip-mongers, European or Asiatic, and it did not take long before it came to the ears of my wife. I don't know who told it to her for she had never discussed the matter with me. She couldn't have discovered it for herself for you know, Tuan, that our women seldom stir out of their homes or associate with menfolk, except their closest relatives. She maintained a stoic indifference that hurt me and drove me to desperation. At this stage let me explain that I loved my wife still—yes, think what you may, I loved her in my own fashion and——”

“Impossible!” I muttered almost involuntarily.

“Impossible? Impossible! Why? Don't you see, man, that one simply can't unlove a woman after having loved her for a number of years? Of course, it may be conceded that I could not have loved her at this stage in the idealistic sense of the word but what about the deep attachment and marital affections that had bound us for so long? No, one cannot sever a bondage of that nature all at once. However, to proceed with my story, this domestic rupture distressed me a great deal while I was at home but when I was with Muriel and took her in my arms, I forgot everything else. All good things have a quick ending, Tuan, in this sad world of ours. Our beautiful idyll lasted for about two years and then grim tragedy swooped on us—relentless, unexpected. It is getting late and I will

soon end my tale. My wife, who at the start only showed a cynical indifference and kept up a stony silence, presumably hoping that my *affaire-de-cœur* would fizzle out soon, now showed her true colours. She stormed and raged and cursed and even threatened to take her life. But I did not in the least feel perturbed, such was the glamour in which Muriel had enslaved me. My brother-in-law who was an immensely wealthy landlord but an unscrupulous scoundrel, took up the cudgels on behalf of his sister. He threatened to bring the matter before the Chief Kathi and the Sultan, who was also the Defender of our Faith, if I did not give up this 'white woman of the street'; and said he, leering at my face, 'if you have the courage why don't you marry her?' When he saw that I wasn't in the least frightened and I had no intention of leaving Muriel, he showed his fangs and swore that he would make me suffer for this to my dying day. At this time things were getting bad to worse for me financially. The rubber price dropped meteorically from two hundred and fifty dollars to one hundred and sixty dollars a pickul. This and my neglect in the management of my two-hundred-acre estate made a big drop in my income. I had to cut down my expenses as I couldn't afford to keep Muriel in style as before. She didn't mind it in the least, sweet soul that she was; only it made me miserable. At this stage allow me to make an observation which to your Western mind may seem only a kink of the Oriental. I say that Allah the Almighty, Allah the Compassionate, the All-seeing,

guides the destinies of one and all of His sons, poor or rich, mighty or humble. I say, it was evident in my case. For if not, why was it, that, at this stage, I was suddenly called away quite unexpectedly to Singapore for a couple of weeks? Why was it, I ask you, that when I came back from Singapore direct to Penang, I found Muriel missing! After a great deal of search I found her in hospital—dying! It transpired that she was suddenly taken ill about ten days back and since then had been consumed with a scorching fever that never abated and she vomitted blood by the mouthfuls! And to think that I had left her smiling and in the pink of health. Now she lay dying! Tuan, I broke down and wept like a child. I felt that hers was a special case and needed special attention and so I had her removed to a nursing home and engaged the best doctors in Penang. Imagine my surprise and dismay when these doctors couldn't diagnose her case. It was not phthisis, or typhoid or malaria or kala azar or—Oh! they were bewildered and helpless. Meantime, she was sinking gradually and appeared to be deaf, dumb and blind. What did I do then? Allah appeared to guide my hand. I did a most unconventional thing. I dismissed the European doctors and called in a noted native physician, Pawang Haji Zaimudin. He was an octogenarian, bent and withered and looked a veritable wizard. He brought with him his son, also a Pawang and examined Muriel thoroughly. They felt her pulse examined her eyes and ears, the palms and the soles of her feet, smelt her tongue and her odour.

and in general pawed her all over. After an hour or so Pawang Zainnudin laid his hands on my shoulder and shook his head. 'Tuan, that gesture of his turned my heart into lead. But he said, slowly and wearily, 'Despair not, my son. An almost hopeless case, but Allah willing, we will bring her round and she will be healthy again and bear children. But it may take days, weeks, or even months. She has been "Shantaued"!'

"I leapt up. Shantaued!—poisoned with the most deadly native poison, the secret of which is known only to the inhuman Sakai-witch doctors! When I heard this I was like one demented. I cursed and raved and felt like committing murder. Who, in all the world, would have done this to my poor innocent Muriel? Who was behind this infernal plot? I knew all at once! Yes, it was none other than that brother-in-law of mine or was it my wife? Perhaps both! I thought I would run home straight and rip their stomachs open with my double-edged kris! But one look at Muriel who lay like one dead, paralysed my thoughts and actions. She needed me now, most of all. Pawang Zainnudin guessed what was passing in my mind. He spoke: 'Agitate not thyself, my son. The miscreants will meet their fate sooner or later but now it is this woman who needs our attention and care.'

"They covered her body up in some tropical leaves and sponged her body continually; for a week they fed her on goat's milk and vegetables and nuts and administered a vile-looking medicine. After that her temperature came down to almost

normal but she lay in a sort of coma, breathing heavily, not speaking, not opening her eyes. Then on the eleventh day of her treatment the doctors told me that they wanted to try an experiment that was fraught with danger, one that might cure her completely or...! They wanted my permission. It was the most momentous decision in my life. What could I do but agree, seeing that here was at least a ray of hope? Besides I had great faith in this Pawang. It was the night of the full moon. At mid-night, they carried Muriel out into the back yard, stripped her completely and laid her down on a couple of huge banana leaves. They then smeared her body, head to foot, with a balm and then sat down to watch for the reaction, if any. Muriel slowly turned stiff and the pupils of her eyes dilated wildly. I thought it was the end. But when the medicine-men noticed this, they galvanised into action. Pawang Zaimudin started to chant some weird incantations and his son fanned her whole body vigorously with a palm leaf. The whole spectacle seemed fantastic, ghoulish and savoured of Black Magic! Soon Muriel began to sweat profusely and moaned piteously. It seemed to me that about a gallon of perspiration oozed out on those leaves. Her body became ice-cold and her stiff limbs relaxed; the fever left her completely. They washed her body in cold water and put her in bed, heavily blanketed. The Pawang sat down wearily and said, 'She is saved!' I could have almost kissed the repulsive old man in my joy. After a time the Pawang took me to the back yard saying, 'I will show you something.' He took me

to where Muriel had lain in the open and picking up the banana leaves asked me to inspect the matter that had been drained out of Muriel's body. The perspiration looked almost bluish in the moonlight and glistened. I touched the stuff with my fingers and sharply withdrew them. The leaves were covered with a thousand particles of powdered glass! 'See! to make death doubly sure, they added powdered glass to the poison. May Allah blast their wicked souls,' croaked the Pawang with a horrid grin. I couldn't but help crying 'Amen' to that.

"The crisis was over and now it was only a matter of time. I rented out a bungalow by the seaside and Muriel slowly regained her health and strength. A couple of months later she was up and about but she lost all her zest, her humour, her joy. She moved about like an automaton, seldom spoke and answered vaguely, all the time wandering about aimlessly.

"Meantime things at home were getting bad to worse. My wife and her rascal brother fully knew by now that I suspected them of their complicity in this dastardly attempt on Muriel's life. The man suddenly became religious-minded and left for a pilgrimage to Mecca. My wife left for Malacca, where her parents lived, taking with her the children. The rubber price had by now gone down to seventy dollars a pickul and my manager and tindals robbed me right and left, there being no one to supervise or check. But I couldn't leave Muriel. She was like a child and clung to me often. Besides, I was

worried about her. Therefore I took her to Singapore and had her examined by a European specialist. He told me that her nerves were badly shattered and if not treated in time and by the right man it might develop into a dangerous psychosis. He advised me to have her treated by a Dutch specialist in Medan or, by Professor Paul Lauritz of Switzerland who was a world famous nerve specialist and a psychiatrist, adding 'if you have the money,' with a warning note. My concern for Muriel coupled with my long-felt desire to visit Europe made me decide upon Switzerland. I still had a tidy bank roll but I felt that that wasn't enough. I therefore raised a good sum of money by mortgaging a portion of my estate. Thus armed with about \$75,000, I set sail for Switzerland with Muriel by the s.s. 'Canton,' determined to bring her back a new woman. I had hoped that the long sea voyage would improve her a long way but, unfortunate man that I was, she took a turn for the worse five days after we left Penang. She uttered not a single word during the rest of the journey. I feared the worst.

"When Dr. Paul Lauritz examined her he pronounced that her brain was already affected. I gave him the whole history of the case. Of course, he had never heard anything of the like before and he confessed that he didn't feel very sanguine about this case. He ultimately undertook to treat Muriel but warned me 'that it may mean anything between eight to ten months, perhaps longer, perhaps never.' His fees were prohibitive, to put it mildly, but what

else could I do but agree. After all, it was but a poor recompense for a girl who had given me all she had. Dr. Lauritz admitted Muriel into his mountain sanatorium and allowed me to visit her only once a week. The colour came back to her cheeks and strength returned to her lissome figure but her eyes betrayed the chaos in her mind. After a couple of months I made up my mind to return to Malaya. My nearness to her only made me feel so helpless and desperate; besides, I knew that I was leaving her in good hands. Dr. Paul Lauritz promised to keep in touch with me and I came back, a lonesome and broken man.

"I went straight home on my return to Malaya. Imagine my surprise and disgust when I saw my house peopled with some of my distant and unsavoury relatives. Within ten minutes of my arrival I received a blow that nearly unhinged my mind. My wife was dead! My infidelity and desertion, poverty and debts and perhaps remorse for a heinous crime to which she was at least a party, drove her to suicide. I will spare you the details but it was a ghastly affair. I grieved for her sorely, Tuan. I grieve for her even now. My children were starved and ragged; they looked upon me as a stranger, with awe and fear in their little hearts. They had been taught, obviously, to hate and distrust one that was their father. Ah, Tuan! it was a great punishment. My wife's brother was dead too--murdered in a drunken brawl, soon after his return from Mecca. Allah decrees all--strange are his dispensations! But this was not all. I found that

my parasitic relatives who were loud in proclaiming their benevolence and their humanitarianism in looking after my children, were a pack of thieves. They had sold my cars, my valuable furniture and other movable properties and had sponged my estate almost dry. To this day I do not know what became of my wife's jewellery which was a fortune by itself. I drove them out of my house and dismissed en masse my estate staff, corrupted and blotted with ill-gotten means. This time I determined to straighten out things and look after the estate myself. First, I settled some of the debts incurred by my late wife by selling a portion of my estate. I then took up the reins of management in my own hands. Within six months I found myself on my feet though the price of rubber was only about sixty dollars a pickul.

"Meantime I had to send a good deal of money to Dr. Lauritz whose periodical reports on Muriel were, to say the least, most disappointing and heart-rending."

V

"But didn't she ever recover?" I asked feeling really sad for the unknown Muriel.

Tuan Syed Abdul Rahman looked away from me, his face twitching with emotions.

"Well, my story is nearing the end. You will judge for yourself. About a year later I received a

letter from the Professor giving me the astonishing news that Muriel had suddenly recovered her mental balance one fine morning and that she was now a perfectly normal woman again. On receipt of the letter I made up my mind to go to Europe as soon as possible and to this effect I wrote to Muriel and Dr. Lauritz. I had to sell a slice of my already diminishing estates to provide the necessary fund and within three weeks of receiving that letter, I sailed to meet the one person who was dearest to me and whom I had almost lost. I tell you, Tuan, that I chafed under the slow progress of the steamer to Marseilles. I wanted to fly like a homing bird. However, when I did reach Dr. Paul Lauritz's sanatorium I was besides myself with joy, especially when I beheld the beaming face of the Professor.

"Ah! Mr. Rahman, our labours are rewarded. Your friend, the beautiful American girl—she is miraculously cured!"

"Yes, yes!" I said, looking everywhere for Muriel. "I cannot express my gratitude to you in words. But—er—where is Muriel? I want to see her."

"See Muriel? But—but—didn't she write to you or inform you that she—"

"What are you talking about, doctor?" I asked, alarmed.

"Why, she, Miss Muriel, she left about three weeks ago."

"Left! Where to?" I asked in a hollow voice.

"Where I don't know. She was perfectly well and wanted to go and so I lent her some money

and let her go. Why, is anything wrong?' the doctor asked with concern.

" 'Oh doctor! everything is wrong,' I cried, suddenly feeling tired and old. All the fight was knocked out of me. Something in me snapped and I felt like a soulless being. It was too much for me. I broke down and wept and prayed to Allah, the Almighty, the Compassionate. Having suffered so much and come so far, I was not going to let happiness slip through my fingers now. I determined to find her at any cost. I found from the sanatorium porter that she had entrained for Lucerne. I went there and found a clue which took me to Bucharest. Suffice it to say, that for a couple of months I crossed and recrossed Europe on a wild goose chase until I found myself in London with a few pounds in my pocket and without any tangible clue of Muriel's whereabouts. Why had the fool of a Professor given her money when she had wanted to leave the sanatorium? But it is all Fate's doing.

"Why didn't I come back then? It would have saved me a lot of heart-break. No! I was mad. I wired to my attorney to sell all my remaining property at any price. Three weeks later with money giving me fresh hope I sailed for America; for after all, she may be safe and sound with her people. But why should she have treated me thus? Me---whom she loved so much and who did all he could---nay, even more---for her. It was unanswerable, irreconcilable. Her parents had moved up North and I didn't find much difficulty in locating them. They didn't know me, of course, but when

I introduced myself, there was an awful scene. They had disinherited her and had nothing to do with her and almost drove me out. But when I told them of Muriel's illness and mental condition their attitude took a frightful turn. Her father and his neighbours got together and nearly lynched me for the 'ruin' and 'murder' of their child. Only her mother's intervention saved me from an untimely end.

"I then took courage in my hands and told the old couple the whole story from start to finish—of our love, our happiness, our tragedy, my sacrifice and torments and lastly her disappearance. And when her parents heard all this, they wept with me and asked my forgiveness. They had given her up for lost—probably enslaved in some Eastern harem. They now joined forces with me and for months we made an extensive search for her.

"The Police, the newspapers and the wireless helped but all in vain. I had lost. Disappointment after disappointment had dulled the edge of my determination and I took my defeat with a calm that surprised myself. There was nothing more to do than to return to my native land. Fate had beaten me.

"The day before I was due to sail back, I strayed into a night club where a cabaret was doing a hot 'can-can.' The place was obviously popular for it was crowded beyond capacity. Perhaps it was the beer that attracted the people. It was well-nigh two o'clock in the morning when I decided to adjourn to my hotel. As I rose, a young couple

entered and came towards the table I had vacated. Tuan, I saw a miracle!—the woman was Muriel! No, I wasn't drunk. I thought I was but I wasn't, neither was I sleeping or dreaming. It was Muriel—my Muriel!

"She laughed and chatted with her companion and looked past me. I planted myself in front of her and almost swept her into my arms crying 'Muriel! Muriel!! Muriel!!!' With a gasp of surprise and terror she wrenched herself from my embrace and took refuge behind the broad back of her male companion. But blindly I approached and said, 'Muriel, why have you done this to me? Why have you been so cruel?'

"The man who seemed bewildered so long, now stepped forward and drawled menacingly, 'Say, Sheik, are you drunk or just trying to be funny?' I paid no attention to him but looked at Muriel beseechingly—at Muriel who peeped at me with anger and fear in her beautiful eyes.

" 'Oh, Muriel! For heaven's sake stop kidding and tell the gentleman that you know me, that you are mine...'

" 'Now, now, Romeo, you stop this tom-fool business with my wife or I will...'

" 'Your wife?' I almost shrieked.

" 'Say, what is funny in that? Joan and I got married a month back,' he said belligerently, putting his arms protectingly round her.

" 'This gentleman is making a terrible mistake, Bob,' she said in that beautiful husky voice of hers that had thrilled and enslaved me.

"How can I ever mistake you for anyone else in the world, Muriel? Tell me, what have I done that you should discard me, ignore me, insult me, pretend not even to know me?" I cried.

"Oh! Can't you understand, Mister, you are talking to the wrong person? I haven't ever seen you in my life, honestly I haven't. Besides my name isn't "Muriel," it is "Joan." "

"Haven't seen me ever?" I asked, hoarsely.

"Honest, never—I" she answered looking frankly at me.

"I stumbled out of the cafe like a man in a nightmare and walked and walked until it was nearly dawn, my mind besieged with a thousand unanswerable questions. I stopped to light a cigarette and as I struck a match, revelation came to me in a flash. It was the only solution and I knew, sorrowfully, that it could be the only possible one. Later, I knew definitely that it was right."

"What was it?" I asked unable to suppress my curiosity.

"Tuan, we mortals are mere pawns in the hands of a Fate—relentless, capricious and cruel. That woman was Muriel—I will swear it to my dying day. Yes, Tuan, it was Muriel. And, this also I say, that when she denied having ever seen me in her life, she was speaking the Truth."

"Truth? Then how on earth could..."

"Yes, she was speaking the truth. You see, Tuan, she was a normal woman again in all respects except one and that—!" He was overcome with grief and turned away his face.

At last he looked at me straight and said in a voice that was natural and perfectly level, "Tuan, she had lost her memory. Her past life was a blank forever!"

THE SACRIFICE

MAT tightened his "sarong" and stretched his scraggy limbs. He was ravenously hungry and there wasn't a single coin in the pocket of his ragged khaki jacket. Nor was there a scrap of food at home, he remembered ruefully, cursing his wife. But not for a moment did it strike him that he had not given a single cent to his family for a whole fortnight. The pale woman and the howling children irritated him. He stalked out of the hut angrily and walked off towards the roadside coffee-shop where he was sure to find some of his fellow rubber-tappers on whom he could still sponge unblushingly.

On his way he gave vent to a sardonic grin as he thought of his wife. What a fool the woman was to have believed that he was retrenched due to the slump! But it wouldn't be long, he thought gloomily, ere the village gossip would carry the story of his theft of rubber latex and subsequent dismissal, to his wife. But what would that matter? He shrugged his shoulders and jogged along.

Days passed into months and yet Mat had not earned anything; but he was not worried. Every morning he went out to join his boon companions and came back at night to rail at her. He pretended to be blissfully unaware of the fact that there was no food at home for the two children and the wife. Harima knew her husband well enough not to complain; she would only be scolded or

perhaps even be kicked and cuffed. She preferred to carry her own burden and share her sufferings with her children. Yet she was loyal and loving to her husband.

Harun was a boy of six. He was strong and sturdy for his age and had a strong appetite. Re'e was a little mite of one year. She was the joy of her mother; she always cheered Harima with her rippling laugh and the semi-intelligible words of a baby which are always dear to the heart of a mother.

It was two weeks since they had a square meal. At first Harima had borrowed petty sums from neighbouring rubber-tappers, but who would for long lend to the wife of a man without a job and besides, Mat was not popular among his fellow-tappers. Harima had then resorted to the pawnshop. By now she had pawned all she had. She had not much that was valuable, but those trinkets were dear to her heart. But it did not matter; her children must not starve. How often had she starved during the last month to give her children a full meal!

To-day, everything was dark. There was no ray of hope. Mat had not come home for two days. There was no rice at home nor was there a morsel of food. She had pawned everything—everything except an old silk scarf that was dear to the memory of better and happier days; she could not part with it, nor would it fetch much—not more than a couple of dollars would the swine of a pawnbroker give.

Harun had gone out to play after having had some damp rice and "blachap" for breakfast. Soon he and the little Re'e would cry for food. The thought made her so miserable; she lay on the mat—for bed she had none—and cried herself to sleep.

She was aroused by the huggings of Harun. "Ma!" he said, "I am hungry." "Yes, Harun darling, but there is no rice at home," she said with a tear rolling down her pale cheeks—cheeks that were once rosy with the vigour of life and happiness.

"Then give me five cents Ma, I want to buy 'Goring Pisang'."

Harima felt desperate. She hugged the boy and kissed him—as if kisses could satisfy his hunger.

Suddenly she stood up. She dried her cheeks with the edge of her sarong. She brushed back her hair with her hands and tidied her face with some rice-powder. Then snatching her old scarf, she hurried out of her cottage, bidding Harun to wait. Yes! She would go to the former boss, Tuan Smith, the Manager. He would be sure to help her for Tuans are always well-to-do and can afford to be charitable. Besides this Tuan Smith was kind to poor people, so she had heard.

Hurried steps soon took Harima to the Tuan's bungalow. The Tuan was a bachelor and he lived alone. But to-day, as she approached the house, she heard voices and snatches of English songs. It was Sunday; the Tuan probably was having a Pahit party. Without hesitation, she pressed the button and Ah Leng, the Chinese 'boy' appeared.

"Is the Tuan at home? I want to see him," she asked timidly. "Yes! you can come in," answered the boy patronisingly. She timidly went in with mingled feelings.

She was shy and afraid; Malay women do not go alone to a bachelor's house—and that of a Tuan's too! Would the Tuan be angry? And what would the gossiping neighbours say?

There were four young men in the drawing room—three "orang puteh" and one Malay, all in shorts and shirt, as is the style of the planters in Malaya. They sat round in rattan lounges and chairs and in the centre stood a small teak-wood table with a whisky decanter and ice. Harima knew all of them. The young boyish Tuan was the assistant of Tuan Smith; the Tuan with the silken moustache and glasses was the manager of a neighbouring estate; and the Malay Tuan—she didn't like him. He was the son of the proprietor of this estate. No one liked him. He was not a true follower of the Prophet. He drank with the Tuans and it is even said that he partook of that "Haraam"—the flesh of the swine. Besides, he always tried to get fresh with the women tappers and behaved as though he was an irresistible Don Juan. Harima distinctly disliked him and felt like turning away! But she was a beggar—she had come to beg; she could not afford to discriminate. The men all stopped talking and looked at her, surprised. They knew her by sight, but could not imagine why she had come there, all alone.

"D—d pretty gal that, eh!" said Rahim, the

Malay youth. "Rather," said the Tuan with the silken moustache, "I think she may--"

"Shut up, you asses!" said Smith, for he had seen the look in Harima's eyes. She could not speak English, but she could understand that they were discussing her and that none too decently. She felt her cheeks burning and she looked at Rahim with flashing eyes.

"Tuan Smith," she said without a tremor in her voice, "I beg your pardon for disturbing you, but my children are starving; will the Tuan be kind enough to help me? Tuan has always been kind to poor folks!"

Smith was touched. He could understand the dire circumstances that had made this timid woman to come there. He took two five-dollar notes and gave her. He could say nothing. Harima took the money and, bidding a "salaam", she hurried out of the bungalow. She felt she was rude. She had not even thanked her benefactor. The venomous eyes of Rahim followed her till she disappeared into the estate.

II

For eight years, Harima had suffered the sorrows and tribulations that are the lot of the poor. The indifference and utter lack of love on the part of Mat augmented her troubles a hundred-fold. Sometimes life had been unbearable; a hundred

times she had been tempted to end her miserable existence. But what right had she to commit the blackest of all "Haraams" which damned her soul everlastingly? What would then happen to her children—her children for whom she had suffered all indignities! Oh! if not for her children, she would easily become the wife of a better and richer man! Divorce was easy and Harima was still young and good-looking, for had not the "Tuans" and "Kramis" of the estate often cast admiring glances at her lithe and supple body?

It was too late in the day to cook. On her way home, she bought food from a neighbouring "makan" shop. The children were so happy. Harima sighed; she was glad to see her children happy, but her pale face and stony stare in her eyes did not change. Harima kept some food for her husband in the corner of the room and covered it with a "sanggai". But she could not eat. She lay down on her mat with her children and soon fell into a troubled siesta.

She was awakened by the hoot of a car. Who on earth would come to her cottage in a motor car? It must be a mistake. But soon there was a knocking. Harima opened the door at once and there stood Rahim, foppishly dressed as usual in European clothes. Harima's heart stopped beating; she could say nothing. She hugged her child to her breast and looked boldly at Rahim who was now entering the cottage with his best smile.

"Harima, why do you look frightened and angry? Have I done any wrong to thee? Look! I, the son of the proprietor, have condescended to

"come here to help thee," he said in his hard rasping voice.

Harima shuddered, but somehow she was not frightened. "Listen, Harima," he continued, taking a step nearer and trying to look into her eyes. "You are a little fool. Fancy sticking to that brute of your husband and suffering like this! Harima, come with me, I sail for Java soon after the 'Hari Raya Hadj'. Come, I shall give you life, love and all that money can buy. Maybe, I shall soon make you my wife, for I like not my first wife. Come, what do you say?"

Harima trembled with rage and despair. For a few moments she kept quiet as if formulating her answer and then, she burst out with the frenzy of a wild cat.

"Get out, you pig! You come to humiliate me, you infidel and untrue follower of the Prophet. You think you can make me one of your harem because I am poor and defenceless. I wish my husband was a man---he would have whipped you for this, but alas, such is my fate! Now, get out before I send my broomstick after you!"

Rahim was flabbergasted at her outburst; he was cowed and without a word, he slunk off like a dog that had been kicked, not even daring to look at her face. Harima banged the door and then--the reaction was too strong for her shaken nerves. She fell on the mat and had a good cry till there were no more tears in her eyes.

Mat came home in a savage mood, "I am awfully tired and hungry. Make me my bed," he growled.

"Your bed is ready and there is some food," quietly replied Harima. She cleaned a bit of the floor with a feather duster and then set out the food she had reserved for him. Mat squatted on the floor to eat his meal, but when he saw the expensive food, he was surprised. But he said nothing. He stared at her malignly and then, giving vent to a dry chuckle, set himself diligently to enjoy his food. Harima heard the chuckle and understood what was passing in her husband's mind. She shivered and felt she would die of shame. But did it matter? Had Mat only taken the trouble to ask her how she managed to procure the food she would have felt fully recompensed. Instead, he suspected her—perhaps of the blackest crime a woman could commit. She felt a murderous resentment against Mat. She thought she would run amok. Her cup of bitterness was full to the brim.

III

Twenty-five days had passed after Smith had given her the two fivers. To-day nothing was left. The last ten-cent piece was spent on rice the previous evening. Now it was late in the afternoon and they had no food.

"Ma," said Harun, putting his chubby arms round his mother's neck, "Ma, I am feeling hungry," he said plaintively, as if to feel hungry was a sin.

"Yes, I shall cook rice," said Harima looking out of the window.

"When, Ma! it is too late already."

Harima was pious and God-fearing. She prayed five times a day as belitted a true Mohammedan. But to-day she could not pray. Her brain seemed to be numbed; she could think nothing, do nothing. Often, when the brain is brought to a semi-paralytic condition, either by a sudden calamity or by prolonged excitement, it acts suddenly with acute precision or decisiveness.

It happened in the case of Harima. She suddenly took a piece of old newspaper and scribbled two sentences in Malay with a piece of dry charcoal. She had neither paper nor ink.

"Harun, run and take this note to Inche Rahim." She sat down with a stolid look in her eyes. Harun soon returned.

"Ma, he gave you this money and said he will come to-night at nine o'clock. Why will he come, Ma?"

Harima took the money; there were five ten-dollar notes. "Harun, it is too late to cook; go and buy five dollars' worth of cakes and sweetmeats."

The child's eyes opened with wonder: "Five dollars, mother? Why so much?"

"Never mind darling, we will have a 'kanduri'."

Harun ran and soon returned with the food. She squatted on the floor and fed her children with her own hands. Hot tears rolled down her cheeks; she was feeding her children with food bought with money that was tainted.

Usually she waited for her husband's return, but to-day she wished that he would not come. But God only knew how she wanted him, perhaps needed him now, of all times.

With perfect coolness, she packed her and the children's belongings in a small rattan bag. Next, she washed the floor and tidied the house. She would leave her husband's house just as she first found it. Then she neatly tied four ten-dollar notes in her old, tattered silk scarf and put it in the most conspicuous place--the nail on which her husband usually hung his coat. He must not miss it; he must not suffer now that she was going away.

At seven o'clock the children went to bed. Then she cleansed herself and knelt down to pray. She prayed long and earnestly.

It was the night before the new moon. At about half-past eight, she heard the sly hoot of a cat. Harima got up. She awakened Harun and carried Re'e on her breast.

"Where Ma?" said Harun now fully awake.

"For a long journey, darling of my heart."

She took a last, lingering look round the room. Then she left her cottage, closing the door behind her and leading Harun with her hand.

"Harima!" softly called Rahim.

"Yes, Tuan, I come," she said, scarcely above a whisper, looking at the child that lay sleeping on her breast.

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GLOSSARY OF MALAY WORDS

Attap	..	Nipah palm leaf.
Babi	..	swine, "haraam".
Baju	..	loose Malay shirt.
Barang	..	luggage ; bags and baggage.
Bin	..	signifies "son of".
Blachan	..	prawn paste.
Che'	..	short for "Inche" (see inche).
Goring Pisang	..	fried banana cake.
Haji	..	one who has performed the pilgrimage at Mecca.
Hantu	..	Devil, ghost.
Inam	..	priest.
Inche	..	Mister, Syn. "Babu".
Jangan Mara	..	don't be angry.
Kampong	..	village.
Kathi	..	a Mosque functionary.
Kitchi	..	small.
Krami	..	clerk.
Kris	..	a Malayan double-edged dagger used by high and low in the Malayan Archipelago—a "national" weapon.
Kronchongs	..	Malay songs, melodies.
Kunduri	..	feast.
Lakas Jalan	..	move quickly.
Lalang	..	tropical sword grass.
Mata-mata	..	Policeman.
Mee	..	Chinese macaroni.
Nyor	..	young cocoanut.
Orang Putih	..	White man.

Padang	.. field, playground.
Pantun	.. popular folk-song in the form of a short poem, usually in metaphor.
Pawang	.. native doctor, medicineman, magic doctor.
Pengulu	.. village headman.
Palat	.. made of rice, containing rice.
Rattan	.. cane.
Remau	.. tiger.
Sakais	.. Malayan aborigines.
Sanggai	.. conical-shaped cover.
Sarong	.. lunggi, native one-piece coloured lower garment used alike by males and females.
Shantau	.. Malay poisoning.
Stengah	.. peg (drink).
Tuan	.. Sahib, Sir, Boss, an honourable affix <i>e.g.</i> "Moulvi".
Tindal	.. native cooly overseer.
Towkay	.. a Chinese landlord, title usually affixed to rich Chinese.
Ulu	.. mossfussil.

